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THE LEES OF BLENDON HALL.

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

"ALICE WENTWORTH,"

ETC., ETC.

"Ἔπειτα ποίας ἡμερας δοκεῖς μ'ἄγειν,
ὅταν θρόνοις, Αἴγισθον ἐνθακοῦντ' ἴδω
τοῖσιν πατρῴοις."

Electra of Sophocles, line 266.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

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THE LEES OF BLENDON HALL,

AN AUTOBIOGRAPHY.

CHAPTER I.

"Scrivo sol per sfogar l'interna doglia
Di che si pasce il cor."

VITTORIA COLONNA.

I HAVE often heard it asserted that the recollections set down by certain recorders of their own lives, of things said and done before them in their early childhood, must be either entirely fictitious, or, at best, the result of a lively imagination, working out the details of facts, subsequently related to

those who profess to *remember* them themselves.

Now I contend, that even those who most sweepingly deny the possibility of such reminiscences, would, most of them, if they troubled themselves to look back into the farthest recesses of their memory, find there indelibly stamped, unceasingly whispering, the images—the echoes—of events and of speeches, which, when tested by such "Landmarks of Life" as the deaths of relations, and removals to this or that place, would be proved to have occurred at an age considerably prior to that which they assume to be the earliest for receiving impressions of the kind. That the depth of such impressions must greatly depend on the disposition, the understanding, and the circumstances of the individual concerned, I am well aware; but my own experience tells me that children do not only frequently perceive and understand far more than they

are commonly supposed to do, but that it is by no means rare for them to be struck by—and therefore to remember—expressions and statements which, partially, or even utterly incomprehensible at the time, yet remain so treasured up in their minds, as to be afterwards, as it were, drawn forth from their hiding-places, to be examined and combined by the light of a more matured reason and wider knowledge.

My life would certainly have been other than it is, had I been, in childhood, what I see that the generality of the world expect and imagine a child to be; that is, a creature that talks and walks, being all the time unconscious of everything but what personally affects it, or is told *to it*, in so many words.

I have reason to wish I had been such a creature!—for I might have loved some whom I hated, and been loved by some who feared me! And yet—I do not—I

cannot—wish I had loved those who—but it is no use anticipating; and since I have taken it into my head to give myself this vent for the thoughts and recollections which at times overpower me, I shall set to work at once, calling up those "first impressions" that have contributed so much to make me what I am. I do not believe I should be incorrect in saying that I have some faint remembrances which date from before I was three, when my baby sister Emmeline was still a sort of novelty; but I have a distinct and positive recollection of my first sight of my brother Godfrey, on his return from sea, which occurred when I was not many months older.—I do not mean to assert that I remember the event in combination with what preceded and followed it, as I should something of note that happened last year; but I remember it as we sometimes distinctly remember one dream of the early part of the

night, though the succeeding dreams have left no trace on the mind.—Godfrey had arrived, I suppose, late at night (after I was in bed and asleep, at any rate), for he was "introduced to me" at breakfast, and I can perfectly recall my father's having to exert some authority to induce me to go near the stranger, who had thus dropped down among us from the clouds, and who, though only a midshipman, and little more than fifteen, appeared to me a man, and a tall man, only second to my father in height and air of authority.

Of what took place the next day, or the next, or the day after that, I can record nothing; though I fancy it must have been about that period that I gathered from the maids "that Mr. Godfrey was not *my* mamma's son, but that of the lady whose picture hung in my papa's dressing-room;" for I conclude it must have been *then* that I imbibed the sort of superstitious awe I

well recollect feeling of the picture I was "on no account to speak to my papa about."

These dreamy reminiscences do not afford much "count of time;" but they are strong enough to make me aware that the keenest pleasure I am sensible of having enjoyed in that early stage of my existence was playing with—or rather being made a plaything of—by my brother. He carried me about, he climbed the tallest tree in the park to get me a squirrel's nest, he took me down to the canal that crossed our domain, to sail the boat he had made for me; he set me before him on his horse's neck, holding me with one hand, and the rein with the other, as he galloped hard down the lane into which the back gate of our stable yard opened; and last, not least, he taught me to repeat "Ye mariners of England" standing upright on his shoulder!

This feat I used to perform frequently, to my father's great amusement, but very

little to that of my mother, who, as I soon found, generally sided with Wilkins the nurse, and the other maids, when they asserted—as they did fifty times a day—"That Mr. Godfrey would break Miss Alswitha's neck!" Opposition probably strengthened the pleasure I naturally took in sitting on high, perched on my brother's shoulder, and well can I recall the exulting laugh with which I answered their warnings, and the pride with which I repeated that I had "papa's leave." I rejoiced in defying Wilkins, and so—I conclude—did Godfrey; though I now suspect there was another person—my mother namely—whom he had still greater satisfaction in provoking; and I can remember enough of those—to me—golden days of childhood, to be aware that sharp words of contention frequently passed between them, on other subjects than his propensity to lead me into danger. I have not memory sufficient to call back

my own feelings on those occasions, probably because they were at the time very undefined. Had Godfrey been a little boy, I dare say I should have thought him very naughty; but as I considered him a man, and a great man, and moreover believed (on the authority of the maids) that he had been "all round the world," I was, I can well imagine, somewhat puzzled as to which was in the right. How long this state of things lasted, I cannot, as I have before said, now tell; but out of it arose one of those incidents, which, petty in themselves, yet stand out in relief to mark the life of childhood. Its memory is stamped on my soul, by its having brought me to know the utmost depths of humiliation that a high-spirited child can experience; while it may be said also to have borne, in an indirect manner, on the turning of events which had their influence on my whole after-life. It happened, one afternoon, that

Godfrey, who had caught me up as I was running downstairs, and seated me as usual on his shoulder, carried me out with him, and tried to open the door that led into the orchard; he could not succeed; he shook it more and more violently; but it was locked, and we could not obtain an entrance. We did not return to the flower-garden however, but, opening the gate which divided the path in which we stood from the drying-ground, we began coasting the orchard till we reached a heap of old bricks and other rubbish, which, lying against the wall, presented a sort of chance-formed ladder, up which Godfrey scrambled without ever losing hold of me. A fine pear-tree hung close over us, and Godfrey, with one foot on the rubbish and the other on the wall, held me up above his own head, bidding me pick a couple of pears. I picked one, and was requesting to be held a little higher to reach the other, when my

father's voice was heard from a distance, calling "Godfrey!" and the necessity of obeying this call forced him to descend from the unstable mound as quickly as he could —being encumbered with me—and obliged him moreover, afterwards, to leave me alone in the shrubbery, into which he turned me, while he ran off to join my father. I recollect feeling somewhat disconsolate when thus left to myself, with the pear in my hand, which Godfrey had told me to keep, and I suppose I felt the shadow of coming evil, as I slowly took my way through the shrubbery to the lawn, where Wilkins, and another maid carrying Emmeline in her arms, were just making their appearance. I was first sharply reproved for being "out without my bonnet," and when they perceived what I held in my hand, their angry words, partly addressed to me, and partly to each other, alarmed me unspeakably.

"One of the jargonel pears that Mr.

Drake has orders to keep for dessert! How had I got it? Where had I got it? Mr. Godfrey has been climbing the tree again, I'll be bound, and breaking it all to pieces with his weight!"

It had never entered into my head that any one could question the *right* of so tall and so authoritative a person as Godfrey to pick either flower or fruit; and I conclude, therefore, that I meant to justify him from the charge of injuring the tree, when I exclaimed:—

"Godfrey never touched the tree; *I* picked it!"

I was answered by a scornful laugh, and was angrily told "not to be a story-teller," upon which I suppose that I too grew angry, and that some obstinacy mingled with the terror, which hindered me from giving any farther explanation of the discredited words, which *I* continued to repeat, and they to chide me indignantly for

repeating, till I was well nigh choked with sobbing and vociferating. I *believe*—for on this point I cannot be certain — that an under-gardener, who joined the party on the lawn while Wilkins was examining me, professed to have seen Godfrey from afar, while contriving the abstraction of this "pear of discord;" and it is probable that his testimony confirmed her opinion of the falseness of mine; for I *know* that I was forthwith laid hold of, and carried into my mother's presence by my accusers, who then repeated all they had said before of Godfrey's guilt in climbing up trees to pick pears, and my wickedness in denying the same. My mother heard all they had to say, and I was then "remanded;" that is, sent up to the nursery, to be kept "under watch and ward" till brought up for judgment before my father. I screamed and resisted with might and main, but was ultimately carried off, and when fairly lodged

in the nursery, my hands were tied behind my back, in which plight (after the lapse of something like an hour) I was presented to my father on his return from his ride. I was by this time past saying anything, good or bad; and I listened in half terrified, half dogged silence, to the accusations brought against me by my mother and Wilkins. My father had been at no small pains to teach me the difference between truth and falsehood, and to convince me that any fault whatever—if confessed—would be more easily forgiven by him on earth, and by God Almighty in Heaven, than the attempt to hide it by deceit. He was the more grieved, therefore, at my having seemingly had recourse to it upon so slight a temptation; and I was too much stunned by all that had passed, and was passing around me, to be able to utter a syllable in my own defence. To those who neither recollect their own helpless

childhood, nor yet have had in maturer years much intercourse with very young children, it might appear the easiest thing in the world for me to have then justified myself, and, by simply relating the events of the afternoon, made it clear that I had not meant even to equivocate. But in fact the confusion of ideas, the notion of having sinned past forgiveness, which too often lays hold of a scolded and brow-beaten child, is such, that it frequently loses all power of explaining itself, through hopelessness, and inability to combine or express its thoughts. I was no exception to the general rule, and therefore received from my father a reproof, which, unjust as I felt it to be, yet pierced my very soul; and I burst anew into a fit of sobbing, which was interrupted, but by no means stopped, by my being again forcibly conveyed to the nursery. I was given dry bread for supper, and much scolded by Wilkins because I "would not" eat it (I

don't believe I could have eaten plum-cake), and again scolded because, when put to bed, I "would not" go to sleep. This last scolding was certainly not without effect; for after having been unjustly reviled and punished for *telling* a falsehood, I was finally reduced to *act* one, by shutting my eyes and feigning the slumber which did not, in fact, visit me till Mrs. Wilkins herself had been some time snoring. The consequence of this (as I now think) very excusable piece of dissimulation was that I heard through the door, which opened from the day into the night nursery, much muttered talk over my own delinquencies, and remarks from Wilkins and Maria to Jane Hickman (my personal attendant) that "*she* always took Miss Alswitha's part." I farther gathered that "high words had passed," in Wilkins's presence, between Godfrey and my mother about the pears, and about the falsehood he had "put into

my mouth." Mrs. Wilkins also gave it as her opinion that "if she were Mrs. Lee, and Mr. Godfrey had had the insolence to speak as he did, and look as he did, when he said, 'that if the orchard-door was kept locked, it was *not done to please Drake*,' she wouldn't have let him sleep another night in the house." I was puzzled by this last speech; I could not understand why it was "thought so rude;" but it also alarmed me, and when, next day, I moped drearily about, feeling as if every one's eyes were fixed in scorn on the "story-teller, I began to fear lest Wilkins's views of justice had been really carried into effect. I soon learnt, however, through the same potentate, that Mr. Godfrey had gone off, early that morning, on a visit of some days to a relation; but that, when he came back, "I was never—no—not on no account—to go anywhere with him out of doors, except it were in her (Wilkins's) sight."

"Them is your mamma's own words, Miss Alswitha, and I shall see you mind them, and don't learn to be a Tom-boy, or a story-teller neither."

I was so often spoken to then, and for some time after, as a culprit of this latter description, that my wonder now is, how I happened not to become the thing I was perpetually called. That I did not do so, is, I believe, mainly owing to my kind and truthful maid, Jane Hickman, whose judicious treatment of me, in that particular, I remember with deep gratitude. The other result of the "pear-disturbance,"—namely, the stoppage of my out-of-door sports with Godfrey (for, as may be supposed, the clause requiring Wilkins's presence, only rendered the prohibition more absolute) brought a change in my every-day existence, of which I remember feeling the dulness, though I showed it so little, that I also remember hear-

ing Wilkins say, in perfect good faith, I believe, "that Miss Alswitha was quite happy with her, and all the better for not tearing about so." I did not venture to contradict her, but I thought my own thoughts, and inwardly regretted my rambles with Godfrey, more especially missing those we used to take together by the canal, that being a place whither—for sufficient reasons, I doubt not—the maids were forbidden to walk, either with or without me. I put up as I could with this cutting off of my pleasures, nor did I grow less sensible of their loss, till—as I suppose—the broken and unsteady weather of advancing autumn kept Godfrey more in the house, and he was, consequently, more often at hand to carry me up and down stairs, to chase me along the galleries, and to take me, now and then, into his "workshop," as he called a little room off his own, where he

turned, "carpentered," and—as the maids expressed it—"made all kinds of gim-cracks." There he told me stories, and showed me pictures, not to speak of frequently exhibiting, for my benefit, his whole assortment of foils and boxing-gloves, at which I stared with more wonder than delight; but which it, nevertheless, somehow entertained me to have put into my hands, while their uses were, so far as possible, explained to me.

In the nursery, this was not thought a very "lady-like" pastime; but, as no ukase had been promulgated against my going about with my brother, when and where he pleased *in*-doors, and as, moreover, my father once told Wilkins that she was not to prevent my going (when invited) into Mr. Godfrey's workshop, my pleasure in so doing was now seldom directly interfered with; and many was the half hour I spent in listening delightedly to a fragment of poetry, or a tale

of adventure, true or fictitious—it mattered little which—for all I then heard had for me the life and force of reality. Sometimes, too, I was told passages in Godfrey's own life at sea; and he had no lack of fireflies, humming-birds, flying fish, nautilus-shells, savages, ourang-outangs, &c., to tell me about; while he sometimes entertained himself with making me read to him passages I noways understood, in certain dingy-looking volumes, the long words in which I did not utter the less fluently from my absolute ignorance of their sense. Why it was that my proficiency in this first stepping-stone to the "ladder of learning" created so much amusement, I could not then understand. But I was, as I have been since told, very little for my age, and though a child of four, who reads correctly, is not in fact a prodigy, I conclude that the smallness of my stature made me appear such, and that it was this circumstance

that occasioned the wonderings I often heard around me as to how I had "picked up my letters." Those who lived in the house might have known that I had acquired them from Jane Hickman, who had profited enough by her schooling to know how to teach, and possessed tact and patience sufficient to impart what she knew; while I, on the other hand, was willing to learn, and ready to come at her call, to the short, but oft-repeated, lessons, which soon give little folks the power of reading, whether they are, or are not, endowed with any wonderful precocity. Be that as it may, my father said it was "good practice for me to read the break-jaw terms in scientific books;" and whether on that account, or out of indulgence to me, he seemed rather to approve, than otherwise, of my visits to the workshop, where I soon got to think the talks and readings I enjoyed full as pleasant as the rides and romps I had thought it such

a grievance to be deprived of. I remember those times — remember them well;—but there is one day more vividly present to me than all the rest. I have good cause to remember it. I was sitting at dinner in the nursery, with Wilkins, the maids, and little Emmeline, when Godfrey made his appearance, and insisted on taking possession of me, just as I had been helped to my portion of rice-pudding, and was thinking ruefully of the necessity of eating it. I was too happy to escape from Wilkins and the rice-pudding; but she (Wilkins) demurred, because "Miss Alswitha had only had half her dinner."

Godfrey, however, was not to be rebuffed; and as I was decidedly of opinion that in this case "half was better than the whole," we carried the day between us, and I followed him to his workshop, where, as I remember, I made up for the rice-pudding I detested, by devouring the remnants of some very

dry bread-cake which Godfrey pulled out of his pocket. He had, I believe, meant to pass the whole day by the canal in watching—I know not what—but something, I conclude, that had enlisted his nautical sympathies, and caused his carrying with him the "provisions" of which I had the benefit, as well as of the change of mind, or change of weather, that had brought him unexpectedly home. He was, as usual, engaged in perfecting some of his "inventions;" but as he was taking up his tools, I asked him to tell me a story about Mermaids, and, seating myself on his knee, listened with untiring interest to the oft-told tale of mariners beguiled by those fair dæmons of the ocean. When it was over, he set me down, to seek, on his shelves, for some print illustrative of what he had been telling me; while I, meantime, employed myself in staring from the window into the small paved inner court on which it looked. I

certainly did not expect to see anything more remarkable than the cat running across the stones, or, at most, one of the servants passing from the brewhouse at the farther end of the little yard, to the back-entrance of the hall. If I had thought indeed, I should have known I was not at all likely to see the latter kind of object, as it was the servants' dinner-hour, as well as that of the nursery, and the domestics were sure to be all in a different part of the building. I did not, however, look out absolutely in vain; for I beheld, issuing from the brewhouse, a Mr. Wyndham, a gentleman I well knew, being in the habit of seeing him frequently.

But what could bring a "visitor" through the orchard and the out-buildings, instead of coming in by the lodge? I know I was surprised; and I remember calling Godfrey to "look at Mr. Wyndham coming out of the brew-house!"

He flung down the books he had just taken up, rushed forward, and looking down into the court, exclaimed:—

"It *is* Wyndham! and I'll be hanged if I don't find out where he goes to next!"

He almost knocked me down as he flew to the door, which, having been locked to keep Emmeline out, and the key being—I fancy—rather rusty, did not open at his touch, and gave him some trouble to unfasten. He got out at last, and I followed him to the top of the stairs, but he pushed me back, almost angrily, and I lingered about the passages in a state of half-alarmed curiosity, which I had no means of gratifying or calming. I thought Godfrey went in the direction of my mother's boudoir, but could not be sure, as I soon lost sight of him; nor did he, or anyone else appear (though, after a time, I heard a good deal of distant banging of doors) till, on the expiration of—I suppose—about an hour, Wilkins came; and having

first reproved me for "standing peeping about where I had no business," carried me off to the nursery. There I remained the whole of that day; nor did I even go down-stairs at half-past three as usual; for I was told "that my mamma was not at all well, and not equal to having my noise in the drawing-room." What may have been my amount of habitual noisiness, I cannot say; but I do not think I can have thereby much annoyed those around me on that afternoon; for my sole employment was watching the lips and eyes of Wilkins and the other maids, as they—under their breath—discussed some subject, which—as it seemed to me by the shaking of their heads at certain pauses—must be of great importance. Nor could I, for a long time, gain any clue to their topic, from the half-sentences now and then pronounced in the usual tone of conversation, till I at last caught the words, "and when master was fetched in," followed

shortly after by the frequent repetition of Godfrey's name, which was uttered by Wilkins with a look of intense reprobation. At last I ventured to ask:—

"What Godfrey had done?"

"Something very bad, Miss! only it's nothing to little girls like you;" and it was in vain that I sought for farther enlightenment.

I desisted from my importunity; but presently, after I had ceased questioning, I noticed Maria and Jane Hickman drawing near the window that looked into the stable-yard, and muttering to each other, "He's going now! they are bringing the horse round!" I climbed up on a chair to see too, and perceived, by the fading light of a November evening, that Godfrey's bay, saddled and bridled, was being held by a groom, before the back exit of our mansion.

"Where is Godfrey going?" I enquired.

"I don't know, Miss," answered Jane, gravely.

"Somewhere he is not ever to come back here from," said the other maid; whereupon I uttered a shriek of lamentation, at the sound of which, I believe, Wilkins was approaching for purposes of correction; but good-natured Jane Hickman, taking hold of me with one arm, while she lifted the other to throw the sash open, in spite of the objurgations of her superior, enabled me to put my head out of the window and call Godfrey, who was mounting, by his name. He looked up; though it was so nearly dusk, I saw his face—I seem to see its angry flush and gloomy expression now!—but a change came over it as he perceived me, and cried, "Good bye, Swithy! I'm not coming back, but don't forget me!" He turned his horse's head —but there was something wrong about the stirrup—he stopped, and said, again looking up at me, "I would take you with me if I

could! When you are a woman I'll come and fetch you; so now God bless you, Swithy, dearest!"

He rode off at a gallop, and I did not see him again for years.

CHAPTER II.

As long as Godfrey was at home, to give me, almost every day, some pleasure or amusement, which he, and he only, could afford me, I cared wonderfully little for what proportion of my mother's (and Mrs. Wilkins's) favor was dealt to me, in comparison with my sister. But after he left us, it was different; for being no longer the main object of any one person's caresses and attention, it began to strike

me, rather painfully, that I now scarcely received either of these good things from anyone, except now and then from my father, and that in a grave sort of way, which — in a manner — awed me, at the same time that I was certainly soothed and flattered by his notice. Without it, I must literally have looked to Jane, the nursery-maid, for all the tokens of affection I was likely to get in the whole house.

It was this state of things, I believe, which led to my continuing to ponder upon the circumstances of my brother's departure, and to my endeavoring — in my own way—to account for it.

To ask directly "why Godfrey was gone?" and "what he had done to make everyone angry?" was the last means I should have thought of adopting; for I had been too much subdued by the looks with which my first enquiries in the nursery

had been received, to expose myself again, knowingly, to such rebuffs in that quarter; while an instinctive feeling, joined to the experience of being generally called "troublesome" for asking questions, of whatever nature, hindered my applying to my mother for the satisfaction of my curiosity.

I therefore went about as usual; took my walks with Jane, or Wilkins, as it happened; played with Emmeline, when it was her pleasure to be played with, and put the toys away regularly afterwards, (as it had been decreed I should always do, when I had had the honor of helping to amuse her), while through and amid all these occupations, I never once forgot, or ceased to meditate on, that last time I had listened to stories in Godfrey's workshop, or that last farewell from under the nursery window, with the fervent adjuration "not to forget him!"

I was not likely to do so; but neither was I likely, through the unassisted powers of my own mind, to come to any rational solution of the riddle that disturbed me; though I certainly (by force of association) connected Mr. Wyndham sufficiently with my brother's exile, to conceive, if not a dislike to him, at least a feeling which prevented my taking the same pleasure in his visits as formerly.

He had always been playful and good-natured with me—he was so still—but I somehow never saw him appear, without thinking directly of his coming out of the brewhouse into the inner court, and, consequently, of all that had happened on that day. Not that I showed my change of sentiment by any active demonstration, but I suppose I must have responded less gaily to his endeavors to be good friends with me, for he once said:—

"How demure you have grown, Swithy!"

I verily believe that, had I been alone with him, I should then and there have asked him:—

"Why he came in through the brew-house *that* day?" and "if *he* knew what Godfrey had done to be sent away for?"

But I was not alone with him, for I scarcely ever saw him except in my mother's presence; and the only outward attempt I ever made to satisfy my mind on what so constantly occupied it, was a question I once put to my father, just as he had parted from a visitor, who had been remarking my strong likeness to Godfrey.

There had been something sad, as well as affectionate, in the look my father cast on me while listening to these observations; but, as he took me in his arms, and kissed me tenderly, the moment our acquaintance was gone, I plucked up courage to say softly:—

"Papa, won't Godfrey *ever* come back again?"

His countenance changed instantly as he put me down, and said, after a pause of some moments, in a dry, set manner:—

"You know, my dear, that when people go to sea, no one can tell when they will be back again."

"Is he at sea now, papa?" persisted I, urging myself on with unwonted valour.

"I am not sure whether he is at this moment; he will be soon, at all events," was the answer I received; "and, Alswitha, dear," added he hastily, "I am going out to the farm; so I must send you up to Jane; I have no time to answer questions."

I accordingly repaired to the nursery, baffled, and hopeless of ever obtaining any result from direct inquiries; for so well does even a young child understand the language of countenance and manner, that I was as fully assured, by my father's demeanour, that he was absolutely deter-

mined to tell me nothing concerning my brother, and the reasons of his leaving us, as if he had plainly said so, and had openly forbidden my questioning him on the subject. I had, for a while, a lurking fancy that at Christmas I perhaps should hear or find out something; I believe, because I had a faint recollection of Godfrey's health having been drunk after dinner on that day, the year before, although he was then absent. But Christmas came and went without the utterance of any allusion whatsoever to the young sailor. Winter passed, spring appeared, and it seemed as if there was nothing left me but to make up my mind to the compulsory ignorance in which I was doomed to exist. What now chiefly vexed me, when I thought of Godfrey, was not so much the missing his presence—I had grown used to do without *that*—but the painful doubt with regard to "what he could have done" to

be in such disgrace, as it was plain he was in, with my father as well as my mother, in the nursery as well as in the drawing-room. My reflections on that head began, at this time, to assume a more tangible shape, through my chancing to overhear some fragments of conversation between Wilkins and Maria concerning some one whom they never named except as "a certain person," but whom I judged to be Godfrey, and no other. Their talk conveyed to me the idea that he had been accused of making some false statement—of telling an untruth, in fact—even as *I* had been in the matter of the pear. That he should be really guilty of what my father had more than once solemnly told me was "a sin before God and a shame before men," seemed to me incredible; but then, "why was my good, kind papa so very angry with him?" There was the puzzling point, the knot I could not un-

twine; for, I neither liked to think Godfrey wicked, nor my father unjust. I did, indeed, now and then vary my cogitations on the subject, by dwelling on a hypothesis suggested to my imagination by the fairy-tales I occasionally got hold of and devoured greedily; being neither more nor less than the notion that my mother, as Godfrey's step-mother, might hate him, as all step-mothers depicted in that lore I delighted in hated their step-sons, and had, therefore, induced my father to send him away.

This, however, was but a passing impression; I knew—at least I was frequently told—"that fairy tales were nonsense," and my discrimination, as may be supposed, was scarcely equal to determining in what degree, and in what points, they actually were so.

Jane Hickman, I must observe, did her best to induce me to lay aside "Mother Bunch," &c., for certain favourite poems

of hers, in an old collection she was very fond of, and so far with success that, under her auspices, I learnt out of it various hymns and little devotional compositions, which I now occasionally recited to my father instead of "Ye Mariners of England." This last I found he no longer had any desire to hear; notwithstanding which, I every now and then said it to Jane Hickman, being myself as fond of it as ever, and having resolved not to forget it, come what might.

The dulness I can so well remember feeling in the winter, had, I am sure, diminished in the spring, and by summer-time had entirely disappeared.

I had always seen my mother pet Emmeline, and only notice me to observe when anything was amiss in my dress or behavior, so I looked on that state of things as simply the natural one; and now that I was spending best part of every day in

the garden or in the park, sometimes, too, getting leave to walk as far as the village with Jane, to buy this or that at "the shop," there is no need to tell any one acquainted with the nature and tastes of a healthy child, that I found interest and occupation in ten thousand petty things, and was considerably too much taken up with them, to "pine" either for my mother's affection, or for my brother's return.

About the end of July my parents went to stay at the house of a relation, and their visit lasted what appeared to me a long time. Emmeline and I remained at Blendon Hall, under Wilkins's charge; and on the whole, though I certainly thought it dull, for the first few days, not to go down to dessert in the evening (seeing that there was none to go to), I presently found myself, if anything, rather a more important person than I was wont to be; and the lack of dessert was made amends

for by my being given, in the course of the day, about twice as much fruit as I should have had if my parents had been at home. I can't say that I think it did me any harm! But the main particular, in which I felt as if I were more of a "somebody" than usual, was the attention paid me by some members of the household, with whom I had in general little or no communication, and who now seemed to think they could not do too much "to please poor little Miss Alswitha, now her papa was gone away." The gardener's wife begged leave for me to have tea at the lodge one evening, a request which (after some difficulties made by Wilkins, by way, I suppose, of keeping up her own and my dignity) was at last graciously acceded to; and accordingly Jane and I passed an hour or two very pleasantly in Mrs. Drake's neat cottage; she enjoying a comfortable gossip, and I being shown over every

part of the hot-houses, hot-beds, tool-houses, &c. &c., by my good friend Drake, the gardener, with whom I was something of a favourite, and who, on this occasion, flattered me greatly by affording me the means of bestowing a certain patronage, in carrying home fruit and flowers to Wilkins and Emmeline, after I had had myself, as may be supposed, quite as much of both as I cared for. I should observe that Emmeline was considered to be either too young or too delicate, or too much of a little princess, for any one to think of *her* having tea elsewhere than in her own nursery, Wilkins having solemnly announced "that she could not take upon herself to let anything be done with the youngest Miss Lee, in her mamma's absence, that wouldn't be if she was at home; Mrs. Lee was so particular about *her*."

It therefore followed, that even as I had gone alone with Jane to the lodge, so I

also went, a few days after (noways lamenting that my mother's particularity was not thought to extend to me) alone with Jane, to enjoy cake, tea, and flattery in Mrs. Gill's (the housekeeper's) room; where, when I had swallowed a sufficiency of those three dainties, I was presented with a new doll, larger than any I had ever yet possessed, and provided with two complete suits of doll's clothes, including all possible undergarments, the work, as I was informed, of Mrs. Gill's eldest niece. I went into a corner and amused myself very happily, in pulling off the one dress to put on the other, and was for some time fully absorbed in my occupation, till, as I was beginning to be less interested in it, my ear was struck by the sound, unheard for so many months past, of my brother's name. I forthwith gave my strongest attention to the half-whispered conversation going on between Mrs. Gill and Jane, continuing, nevertheless,

to arrange the doll's pink sash with the utmost care, and then proceeding to fold up her "changes of raiment," with the appearance, I doubt not, of my whole soul being absorbed in the employment. It is a remarkable fact, and yet one I have scarcely ever heard noticed, that in spite of the real simplicity—transparency even—of childhood, the deepest of full-grown "diplomatists" might envy that veil of apparent indifference which is most effectually cast over the features in the years nearest to infancy. The "volto sciolto"—that desideratum of the wily politician—which few attain in after life, seems to be part of the nature of many an intelligent child of four or five, who, when present at conversations of its elders, appears to take no more notice of what is being said than if the words were uttered in a foreign tongue. That these things are so does not always admit of demonstration, because the little "Talleyrands"

are sometimes too acute to betray themselves; but others are less cautious, and, after the lapse of some hours, perhaps of some days, will give proofs, strong enough to satisfy any attentive observer, of the knowledge they possess, and the manner of their acquiring it. But this is a digression, and I only meant to say that I conclude that "veil of apparent indifference" effectually concealed what was in fact working within me, for the speakers grew less cautious, and I at length heard Gill say distinctly:—

"Well, I never should have thought it of Mr. Godfrey! but you see what he didn't stick at!"

"It's very strange, to be sure, Mrs. Gill," returned Jane, "but mayn't he have been mistaken like? for he always seemed such a frank-spoken young gentleman, one as couldn't, if he would, have told an untruth!"

There it was; he *had* been accused of falsehood!

I strained my ear yet more painfully, and when I heard the answer come—"But, you know, he said he saw what he couldn't ever have seen," I was no longer able to contain myself, and running up to Gill said, looking full in her face:—"What did Godfrey say he saw that day?"

"He said," replied Gill (regardless of a "hush" from Jane) "that he saw some one come out of the brewhouse, while we were all at dinner, who never could have been there."

"Was it Mr. Wyndham? He *did* come out of the brewhouse; I saw him out of Godfrey's window. Was that what Godfrey said?"

Neither of them answered me; but Jane's face grew as red as fire, and the housekeeper's countenance betrayed an equal amount of disturbance. They should, I thought, have been very glad to find that Godfrey had told no falsehood; but, though

Gill did say, after a pause, "that she now saw Mr. Godfrey *had* spoken truth," neither she nor Jane looked the least glad—frightened rather—and they moreover frightened *me* (Gill did so at least) by her look and tone, when she solemnly charged me, "whatever I did, never to say a word to my mamma or papa, either about my brother, or Mr. Wyndham, or the brewhouse, or anything else."

I would not promise; and though, of course, I cannot recollect the words into which I put my objections, I contrived, in my own childish way, to make them understand, that I thought it wrong not to clear Godfrey to my father.

Mrs. Gill and Jane looked at each other in dismay; indeed, I could see that the latter was trembling from head to foot; and, as terror is infectious, *I* also became the more alarmed, and therefore the more easily swayed by the next address of Mrs.

Gill, to whom Jane, in this extremity, seemed to have resigned the task of managing me.

Mrs. Gill's discourse, if I could give it *verbatim*, would, I doubt not, appear sufficiently absurd; but it was well devised; for besides telling me that "God would not love me—would perhaps punish me—if I disobeyed those that were set over me, by speaking of things I could not understand," she also alluded to my disgrace about the pear, observing how careful I ought to be of what I asserted, and reminding me how my papa had said it would be a long time before he could trust me again.

I was thoroughly daunted, but would not for some time consent, in words, to what was wished; and it was only by dint of reiterated warnings against the sin and peril of disobedience to authority, that such an engagement was extracted from me as satisfied Mrs. Gill, and appeared greatly to relieve

Jane. I was not much satisfied myself, however; for, in spite of Mrs. Gill's awful hints of the possibility of my being overtaken by a "judgment" if I spoke, and of the farther possibility of my not being believed, I had myself a strong belief that God loved the truth, and that I ought to tell it; but I was—as I said before—daunted, and gave up all thoughts of the active interference that was so much deprecated.

The tea-party soon broke up; for somehow, after I had so unexpectedly joined in the talk of my elders, there was no inclination, on my part, to return to the dressing and undressing of my new toy, nor, on theirs, to pick up the broken threads of any gossip they had been previously exchanging.

I took my gaily-attired doll in my arms, and, retiring to my own quarters, let myself be put to bed submissively, albeit in a

mood which kept me long awake, first in the twilight, and afterwards in the dark. The door was—as usual—open between our day nursery and that in which we slept, so that I perceived there was an immensity of whispering between Wilkins and my maid; but I suppose that the proof I had lately given of an inconvenient capacity for attention rendered them cautious; for they literally did not speak above their breath, and not a word of what they said reached the crib where I lay, my body all ear, my mind all curiosity.

The same line of caution was subsequently adhered to; no allusion was ever made either to me, or before me, to what had passed in the housekeeper's room, and I failed signally in some efforts I made to get Jane to talk to me on the subject. It would not do; there was no help for it; and the eager longing to penetrate the mystery which, I felt, must

exist somewhere, laid hold on me again as strongly as in the first days after my brother's departure; but I dared not even say "How I longed to know" what it all meant; and nothing remained for me, save to wish that some wonderful event (like those I had read of in story-books) might come to pass, in order to make my father aware of Godfrey's innocence.

CHAPTER III.

"Oh day of all days, that have dawned on me,
Most hateful!"

201—ELECTRA OF SOPHOCLES.

No one who knows children will wonder that the confused as well as intimidated state of my mind utterly precluded my making any attempt, on the return of my parents, to act against the awful adjuration of Mrs. Gill, by seeking to clear Godfrey in my father's eyes. I never named

him. But one day, not very long after the heads of the family were again settled at Blendon Hall, I heard myself called by Mrs. Gill into my father's dressing-room, where I was somewhat surprised to see him also, and more surprised at perceiving that she was in earnest talk with her master, whom I had never before known to exchange a word with any of the female servants except Wilkins and Jane. I was soon sent out, however, my father saying in a displeased tone:—

"No, Mrs. Gill, I had rather not have the child cross-questioned. You may go into the garden, Alswitha."

I left the room; but not shutting the door after me, I heard Mrs. Gill answer, while I was looking for my little watering-pot in the hall:—

"As you please, sir, I shouldn't have named it, only for what I've seen myself; and if Miss Alswitha—"

Here the door was shut, and I *did* go into the garden, where I presently saw, through the open house-door, Gill crossing the passage, with a more than usually stately and important air, from my father's room to her own quarters.

I was now possessed by a conviction I could not clearly account for, that the conversation in the study had some connection with Godfrey and what "he had said he saw;" and had I been a few years older, I should have made many internal observations on the marvellous inconsistency of Gill's talking to her master herself of what she had so expressly forbidden me to say a word of; but, as it was, my speculations did not go deep; so much was always happening that I could not account for! Only that, in general, I did not care for what was incomprehensible, and on this occasion I did, and wondered "whether papa had

at last been told that Godfrey had done nothing wrong?"

But I did not venture to speak, even to Jane, of what had so much re-awakened my anxious curiosity, and I therefore went on with my usual employments and amusements, speaking when spoken to in the drawing-room, and ruminating at odd times, in a disjointed way, over the possible and impossible reasons of my brother's expulsion, without growing, in fact, at all the wiser, or even fancying that I saw any greater probability of his coming home.

So passed some time after the closeting of my father and the housekeeper, until the coming of a day, some of the minutest incidents of which remain as freshly stamped on my memory as if they had occurred yesterday; while others are shrouded in a mist I can only now penetrate, by the help of conjecture and combination. I have

already said that I had been able, for nearly a year back, to read fluently, and that I had latterly taken to the diligent perusal of an old volume of fairy-tales. My having no companion with whom I could play on equal terms, had, probably, sharpened my appetite for reading; for it increased daily, and it had now become my custom, whenever I was in-doors, to open every book I came across, and to study it more or less attentively, according as it happened to strike my fancy, or otherwise. Whatever lay upon the drawing-room table, or stood within my reach in the library, was sure to become my prey; but, as I gradually discovered that in the former place my amusement was apt to be interrupted by orders to put down "what I could not understand," and oftener still by commands to "go and play with Emmeline," I got more and more into the habit of betaking myself to the library,

where I was very seldom disturbed; and to the library I repaired on the morning of that day, which was, as I have since learnt, the 12th of Sept., 1835. I went in quest of a large volume of the Arabian Nights; but not finding it, and lighting, in its place, on the quarto edition of Scott's Border Ballads, I was presently fascinated by its contents, and prepared myself to enjoy it in my own way. The library at Blendon was (is, I should say, for it remains unaltered) a long room; and, except in the very sunniest weather, somewhat a dark one, in spite of an attempt to brighten it by a mirror, placed in the pier between the two windows, in the bay at the end. The thickness of the wall in that part of the house produces, in each of these windows, a sort of little recess between the panes themselves and the ample folds of damask drapery hanging from the ornamented rods above. In

one of these recesses it was, that morning, my pleasure to ensconce myself; and when seated on the floor with the Border Ballads on my lap, a thick curtain between me and all intruders, and with the farther protection of a large arm-chair of carved oak, which was "never to be moved on any account," I was not likely to be seen and called away to any less pleasing occupation.

I devoured one ballad after another, and was already absorbed in Scott's own mysterious legend of the "Eve of St. John," when my attention was diverted by the hasty tread of a man in the little anteroom which formed the only access to the library; and, on looking out from my place of retreat, I saw my father enter with a strangely-perturbed and gloomy countenance. He held in his hand a very small desk — or writing-case, rather — of my mother's, and, walking straight up to a

large inlaid cabinet which stood close to the curtain which concealed me, he proceeded to unlock it. I had never seen the cabinet opened in my life; so, leaving the ballads on the ground, slipped out of my nook, and, taking care not to rub against the carved arm-chair, I came forward to examine the—to me—wonderful internal arrangement of shelves, drawers, &c., in this old-fashioned piece of furniture.

"Are you going to lock up mamma's box in there, papa?" I inquired.

I received no reply; but my father *did* put the writing-case into the cabinet, shut it up, and, having locked it and put the key in his pocket, then first perceived my presence. He gazed on my face with a peculiar expression, looked at himself a moment in the glass between the windows, then at me again, and finally clasping me in his arms, and lifting me up, gave me such a wildly eager kiss as I had never been

given before. When he set me down, he said, in a voice that sounded strangely in my ears:—

"You are your brother's image, as they all say, and he is a Lee, if any one is!"

His mentioning the name suddenly emboldened me to disobey the injunctions laid on me, and I said hastily:—

"Papa, Godfrey didn't tell a story!"

"I know he did not, child!" replied my father in a still hoarser and more unnatural voice, but drawing me again towards him as he spoke, "I know *too* well now," he added, "that he never spoke a word but truth!"

Thus speaking, he left the room, and I was about to follow him, when he desired me somewhat sternly to "stay where I was," and I remained in a state of terrified confusion of mind, almost amounting to stupefaction. I did stay where I was, but I could no longer amuse myself with either stories or poetry; my thoughts could penetrate no

meaning for what had just been passing, but an indescribable feeling told me that something dreadful and unhappy was going forward, and this sensation it was that led me, like a frightened animal, to seek my old hiding-place, where I could sit undisturbed, unperceived, and go on wondering "why papa said he knew *too* well that Godfrey always spoke truth!" There I sat, motionless, until I heard what sounded to me like my father's peculiar way of shutting the hall-door after him in going out, whereupon I thought of leaving my nest and going to the nursery, to find a sort of protection, I suppose, against the indescribable fear and sadness that had come over me; but just as I was preparing to issue forth, I heard a step, steps indeed, not far from me, and then my mother's voice, speaking to some one else in an agitated tone, though not distinctly enough for me to follow her words. The answer was in a man's voice, a voice I knew well—

Mr. Wyndham's. I have said that the sight of him never failed to remind me, by pure force of association, of Godfrey and his last day at Blendon; but now that I knew a little more—now that I was certain Godfrey's disgrace and departure *were* connected with a something—though I could not tell what—that had to do with Mr. Wyndham, his presence, and the notion of having to go up and shake hands with him, were more disagreeable to me than ever.

He went on speaking. At first I only caught a word here and there; but even when he drew nearer, and I was able to hear more, I could not at all understand him. He seemed to have been pursued, talked of having been "hunted back into his old corner," of having been "nearly caught behind the ice-house." I might have thought he had been playing at hide-and-seek, only that I knew grown-up people did not do that; and then

he did not appear the least merry, but angry rather, though he said to my mother that, after all, it would not signify "if she would only do" or not do something, I could not gather what. I felt more and more frightened every minute where I was, and still more alarmed at the idea of being discovered; but I was able, nevertheless, to contrive myself a momentary peep-hole, through which I saw, to the increase of my surprise, that Mr. Wyndham did not look at all as he usually did, but more like a labourer of some kind. What *could* it all mean? At last I heard him say, "I must be off now, it's my best chance;" whereupon my mother exclaimed, "Then you must take me with you!" He seemed unwilling to comply, but she went on begging and praying him to "take her away." "She *must* go, now *he* had got the letters;" and then came questions as to where *he* was, and where he had put "the letters." My

mother seemed scarcely able to speak, but she gasped out "that she supposed he had them with him, for that he had said he should show them to her brother."

"Then we are done for!" said Mr. Wyndham, angrily; adding, after a minute or two, "How did he go? and when?"

My mother answered in a very faint voice, but loud enough to be heard distinctly by me:—

"That he was not yet *gone*, though he had left the house—the mail did not pass the west gate till one—he would walk there, she supposed, through the wood."

I did not venture to use my eyes a second time; but my ears told me that Mr. Wyndham was moving to depart. I once more heard my mother implore him "not to leave her to her fate," and again I lost the reply given, while she was following him into the ante-room, and its door was being softly opened.

He left the apartment with a stealthy tread; and when he was fairly gone, it seemed to me that my mother, returning into the larger room, flung herself on the sofa, where she wept and sobbed audibly, uttering at times broken exclamations of sorrow, which I could not make any distinct sense of. Why was she so unhappy? What did she wish to go away for? and where did she want to be taken to? Was my papa angry with her? And what could Mr. Wyndham have to do with them, or with Godfrey? Perhaps—I had read of such things in stories — he was a wicked man, who, from liking to do mischief, had said false things of my brother, making my parents quarrel about him; and, if so, I wished he might be punished; but I wished still more that my mother would get up from the sofa and return to her boudoir, that I might escape unseen, and not be hunted for at dinner-time, and be discovered

there, where I felt instinctively sure I should be blamed for being found lurking.

It was, however, no use wishing; for though she rose in a few minutes, it was not to go, but to walk up and down the centre of the room, till I, in despair, once more took up the "Border Ballads," to try if I could amuse myself with them, and perhaps in the unacknowledged hope of seeming to be entirely taken up with them, in case I were tracked to my form before the apartment was cleared. I began again to follow the adventures of the Baron of Smailholm and his lady; but though I read that fearful tale, and though my spirit was awed both by what I did and what I did not fully understand in it, I kept listening and peeping at intervals, wondering when I should ever be released from my self-imprisonment behind the curtain. I read on and on, however, till I was startled by the sound of a shot; I jumped up from the

ground, and the noise I made could not have failed to inform my mother of my presence, had she not herself rushed to the corresponding window the moment after the report.

I conclude that she saw nothing explanatory of the sound, for she resumed her walk, though more leisurely than at first, and I, sitting down anew, resumed my study of the "Eve of St. John." I finished it—I read it over again—and so thoroughly is Scott's wonderful poem entwined with all my remembrances of that fatal day, that I never even see its title, without feeling myself transported to the recess in the library at Blendon, whence I overheard the talk of those who—albeit I knew it not—were as "lawless" in their love as the guilty pair recorded in the ballad. How long I sat there I cannot tell; but when the clock had already struck one, and I thought that Wilkins or Jane would

shortly commence a search for me, I began seriously to contemplate the daring fact of walking forth from my hiding-place, without waiting for my mother's departure.

I was long making up my mind however, and I put off moving from minute to minute, till I was suddenly aware of steps and voices in the hall, then of Wilkins's entrance into the library, and of my mother's asking her "What on earth had happened? and why she looked as she did?"

Wilkins's answer was in a low voice; I could not catch the words where I was; but my mother uttered a shriek, at the sound of which I rushed forward, heeding nothing but the desire to fathom at once what had befallen, and looked up in Wilkins's face to enquire the cause of so much consternation.

"You have got no papa now, Miss Alswitha!" said the nurse.

And while I stood, petrified by the news

of an event, the reality of which I could not yet take in, she turned to her mistress, who sat covering her face with her hands, and said, as if going on with a narrative:—

"The pistol was found close by; Robert picked it up, and Hutchins says it is one of those poor master always kept loaded on the high shelf in his study. Oh, if any of us had but seen him as he went out!—for he must have had it in his hand!"

I did not understand the whole meaning these words conveyed, and I asked:—

"Who had killed papa?"

Wilkins answered:—

"Nobody."

But, as I conclude I only looked the more bewildered by her reply, my mother, who, I imagine, became now first aware of my presence, said to me distinctly:—

"Your papa was not in his right mind—did not know what he did—and shot himself."

Then directing her words to Wilkins, she went on to say that she had for two or three days noticed something unusual and unaccountable in my father's temper and spirits, especially that morning, when he had appeared to her evidently under a delusion.

She then threw herself back on the sofa, and lay motionless, as if absorbed by her feelings; till, as Wilkins was going to lead me away, she started, desired her to leave me with her, and to bring me my dinner where I was.

I could not eat more than a few mouthfuls of what was set before me; and there was something in my mother's way of watching me, that increased, instead of soothing, the dread and agitation to which I was a prey.

At last, the restlessness indicated by her look and gestures so much alarmed me that I slunk under the table, and began to

cry; but she called me to her in a gentler voice than usual, and said, putting her arm round me, "that she did not wonder at my crying, that we were all very unhappy, but that I must try and quiet myself;" and, thus speaking, she placed me on the sofa, arranging the cushions so as to form a sort of bed, as I had often seen her do for Emmeline, but never before for me.

I lay down, and, fairly worn out by the crowd of new and sorrowful emotions which had been succeeding each other within me, cried myself to sleep ere long.

When I awoke, which was not till late in the afternoon, my mother was standing with her back towards me, watching some burning papers, which were being rapidly consumed in the empty grate. The inlaid cabinet was open, and my mother's writing-case, which I had seen my father lock up that morning, was on the table. It may appear strange to some, but it is in fact

only a proof of my having been in reality as thoroughly childish as others of my age—that though I observed all these circumstances, and though I had overheard so much eager talk about "letters," I never at the time combined my observations; *that* was the work of after years.

That the writing-case contained those "letters," I did not understand; if I had, I should probably have told my mother "that papa had put them into the cabinet;" and I was therefore far from guessing at what I now conclude must have been the case, namely, that when it proved that no letters were found on my father's person, she sought for, and discovered them, in the cabinet, of which the key was, of course, brought to her, with the rest of those my father had about him.

But though, as I have just said, I could not "combine my observations," I could

think and ponder over what I saw and heard, in my own way; and I suppose that the sight of the cabinet and the writing-case, vividly recalling every event of the morning, brought me the better to realize the sad truth that I should never see my dear papa again; and also to the remembrance of my mother's having said to Mr. Wyndham "that she *must* go away —that she could not stay *here* any longer."

This recollection, and the dread of being thus utterly deserted, deprived, as it were, of both parents, rendered me so desperate, that overcoming the awe with which my mother inspired me, I asked her at once "if she were *really* going to leave us?" My mother looked round, surprised to see me awake, and repeating my words in a tone of astonishment, enquired "what had put such a thing into my head?"

"Because you said so to Mr. Wyndham this morning," I replied.

"Then," said my mother, fixing her eyes severely upon me, you were behind the curtain there all this morning hiding yourself! You are old enough to know better, and I am very much ashamed of you, Alswitha! You hid yourself, to listen to talk that was not meant for you, and that you could not understand; and when little children do that, they always make great mistakes. What I said to Mr. Wyndham was, that if your poor papa did not get better, I must go to your uncle's at Bransby, to see if I could get him to help me; *now* your uncle will come here. You should take care what you say, Alswitha, for you generally hear wrong."

If this speech relieved me, on the one hand, from the confused dread of being perhaps deserted like the "Babes in the Wood," it gave me bitter pain on the other; for, child as I was, I had already heard the word "listener" used as

a term of reproach, and should certainly have thought it wrong to hide myself—as it was implied I had done—for the express purpose of hearing what I was not meant to hear. I had not, in fact, done so deliberately; but whether I did or did not make any strong attempt to justify myself from the charge of listening with "malice prepense," I was not very likely to obtain a favourable hearing; and I sobbed and sobbed, till my mother, guessing probably that her object of making me ashamed to mention her conversation with Mr. Wyndham was sufficiently attained, spoke more kindly to me, saying she was sure I should never do so again, and offering me a story-book if I would sit quiet and not be troublesome.

I don't know what the story was; I suspect a sort of tract about a good little boy whose parents were dead, and who went to sea because his grand-

mother was too poor to maintain him; but it made me think of Godfrey, and wonder where he was, when I should see him again, and whether my mother knew as well as my poor papa had done, that he had not told an untruth. I think it probable, too, that if I could recall as much of what I thought as of what I heard that day, that I reflected a good deal on the received axiom of "children always making mistakes about what they hear;" and that I may have conceived myself an exception to the general rule. However that may be, I had been too much humbled that afternoon, to be likely to express my opinions on the subject even to Jane, had I been alone with her, which I was not, either that night or for long after.

My mother spoke kindly to me more than once that evening, and at last announced to me that I should sleep with her (an honour I had often envied Emmeline for enjoying

during my father's occasional absences), and, going up to her room herself when my bed-time came, she sat by me till I fell asleep. I woke up again, however, to see the strange shapes of the furniture in the dark room, into which the light of my mother's candle in the adjoining boudoir (where she must have remained long a watcher) cast but a faint glimmer, rendering the gloom only more awful. All the events of the dismal day now drawing to its close oppressed my childish spirit with a mixture of fear, affliction, and bewilderment, which hindered my sleeping till past midnight, the striking of which hour, and its effect on my perturbed imagination, return upon my memory even now with an appalling force, testifying to the condition of mind in which I spent my last waking minutes the night after I had lost my father.

CHAPTER IV.

BLENDON HALL, and the surrounding estates, had, in consequence of a will drawn up and signed by my father about six months previously, become my mother's for her life-time, and were not, until her death, to revert to Godfrey, who, being only her junior by nine years, might never live to inherit them. I did not know this at the time, neither was I aware of my mother's having said "that she could not, after what had occurred, expect to recover peace in

the place which had been the scene of her bereavement, and that she must, therefore, take measures to let it on a long lease," which she eventually did. I knew we were "to go away," and that was all; for, distinct and sharply defined as are my reminiscences of the day of my father's death, my recollections of the time intervening between that 12th of September and the period of our leaving Blendon, late in autumn, for Boulogne, are far from clear, and I retain little more than a general impression of having existed in a moping, unhappy, awe-stricken state, in which my perception of the gloom and desolation spread over the whole house helped, no doubt, to keep me. I know that I was—for reasons I now fully comprehend—more constantly in my mother's presence than I ever was before or since, and that I continued to occupy her room at night, while she, I believe, generally retired

to the boudoir adjoining it when I went to bed.

Beyond this, however, and my remembrance of the darkened apartments on the day of the funeral, and the coming in of the male relations of the family who had attended it, my memory supplies nothing. Of our move and our journey—things in which children generally take great delight—*I* have no pleasant reminiscences, recollecting only that Wilkins was very cross. (I have since heard that she exceedingly disliked going abroad, and had only been bribed into doing so by a considerable increase of wages.) I know that I was *not* cast into a state of rapturous amazement at my first sight of the mighty ocean; I might have been so, perhaps, had I chanced to behold it, either in the brilliancy of its summer blue, or in the wildness of a winter storm; but we crossed the Channel on a dull, calm day at the end of October, when both sea and sky were as grey, and almost as im-

movable as lead, and I saw nothing striking in one or the other.

I cannot either recall much of our original settling at Boulogne, except a dreamy notion of its being accompanied, in my mind, by a vague feeling of disappointment at seeing and hearing nothing of Godfrey, whom I had had a childish notion of meeting with "at sea," or "in a foreign country." But I do not suppose I betrayed this silly castle-building to any one save Jane Hickman (who accompanied us to France); and my first defined and precise recollection of what befell me in "the English colony," was the formal commencement of my education; for it was presently arranged that I should go, every day, to receive instruction in French, writing, and arithmetic, at a school where both English and French girls were boarded, but where I —as a great favour, and in consideration of my very early age—was admitted in the capacity of "*Externe.*"

After the very first, I liked my existence there well enough, having plenty of companions, and being a good deal petted both by French and English. I soon chattered glibly in the language of the former, and it was my delight to teach words and phrases to Jane, who always accompanied me to and from Madame Le Gallois' establishment, while she in her turn kept up my English, by never letting me forget the pieces of poetry I knew by heart. I talked to her now and then, too, about Godfrey; and though she gave me no information concerning him, she always listened sympathisingly; being, I fancy, the more disposed to do so, from having herself a brother, one Tom Hickman, about whose leaving his home, and about whose general prospects, she at times suffered great distress of mind. What the exact nature of her uneasiness was, I did not know; but I noticed, within some months from our leaving England, that she grew melancholy, and that she and Wil-

kins had discussions in which "brother Tom's" name was mentioned, and which were not always quite amicable; but I did not understand their drift, nor did I learn much through the inquiries I sometimes ventured to make.

During the whole of the year thus spent at Boulogne, my sister Emmeline and I had our tea every evening with my mother; but, from my being at school all day, I saw—with that single exception—even less of her than I had been used to do in my father's lifetime, at Blendon. I know, however, that she led a life of very strict retirement, that she received very few visitors, and that she never stirred from home for a day, till, in the November year after my father's death, she left us to go to Paris with a Mrs. Stratton, and not long after that event, we were informed by Wilkins that our mamma was shortly to be married to Mr. Wyndham.

It is not in my power to disentangle—if I

may so express myself—the various threads of feeling which crossed and intertwined each other in my mind on receiving this utterly unexpected intelligence; but I know that the combination of them produced in me such a sense of bitter sorrow and deep displeasure as many would consider to be beyond what so young a bosom could contain. That *any one* should take the place of my papa would have grieved me; but that his successor should be the person, of all others, who was associated in my mind (by his presence at both periods) with Godfrey's banishment and my father's death—that *he* should be my mother's choice, seemed to me a fact as painful as it was surprising. I perceived, also, that I was not the only person thus affected by the event, for during the six weeks of my mother's absence, I heard things pass at odd times between Wilkins and Jane, which showed that *my* attendant, at least, looked on her mistress's marriage, not only with grief, but with a feeling akin to horror.

One evening, when I ought to have been busy learning my lesson for the morrow, but was nearer to Wilkins and Jane than they supposed, I heard the latter exclaim :—

"I can't abide that man's being put in poor master's place, and I wish things may all have been as they ought to be!"

Wilkins looked sternly at her, indicated my near neighbourhood by a rapid gesture, and instantly despatched me to the most distant corner of the room, "to learn my lesson properly." But, distant though I was, my attention was so sharpened as to enable me to hear Jane reply, with perfect self-possession, to her superior's rebuking frown, "that there was no harm in what she had said, for she didn't pretend to know anything *for certain* ; it wasn't her way to go supposing and fancying things; she had seen what she had seen. For," continued she, dropping her voice still lower, yet not so as entirely to make me lose her words, "besides his skulking about the

house at other times, that very day we lost poor master, I saw Mr. Wyndham (though he didn't see me, and though he wasn't dressed like he usually was), but I saw him, through the open passage-door, walk out of the library into the study, just as the clock struck twelve!"

I could not catch Wilkins's answer, and, perhaps from suspecting that I might still be within ear-shot, they sunk their voices to an absolute whisper, while they carried on their argument, which lasted long enough for me to have full time not only to learn my lessons, but to consider deeply why so much importance and implied blame were attached to Mr. Wyndham's presence at Blendon on the day alluded to, or on any other; and I should infallibly have inquired the meaning of it, had I not been made so ashamed of the manner in which I had myself become aware of his being in the library on the 12th of September, that I ever dreaded an approach to the

subject. My own attempts to fathom the matter were vain; and when, tired of fruitless endeavours, I again drew near Wilkins and Jane, stating "that my lesson was learnt," I found them still talking eagerly, but on a different subject, and with little regard to whether I listened or no.

"It's hard, Mrs. Wilkins, and very hard," said Jane, "when things was as good as proved against Richard Carter, that folks should begin saying what I hear from home that they *do* say, only because Tom has not been seen since! He that would have gone through fire and water for poor master! He was in trouble, I know, and had been wild, like many another, but that's no reason why" . . She stopped short, and then added with a sigh, "that she wished she knew where Tom was gone to!"

"I wish you did, Jane," replied Wilkins, drily.

"But you see," she continued, "how

bad and wrong you think it, when the neighbours speak ill of your own flesh and blood; and that should make you mind when you are about taking other people's characters away."

She then proceeded (after sending me away to play in the window with Emmeline) to administer a muttered lecture to Jane, on the subject, I believe, of mischief-making, but little of it reached me. I only know that it resulted in making her on whom it was inflicted weep bitterly; nor could I, by force of either prayers or caresses, prevail on her to explain to me the cause of her grief, any further than that "she was unhappy about her brother, and did not know where he was."

Why she had alluded so emphatically to her brother's being ready "to go through fire and water" for my father, I could no more guess than I could imagine why Mr. Wyndham's being or not being at Blendon

was supposed to signify so much; was he believed to do harm there, like an evil genius or a sorcerer? Perhaps he was; but, not expecting to be told, I did not ask; and so, becoming no wiser on the subject, I gradually thought less of it, though I never actually forgot that talk of Jane's with Wilkins.

After a time, my mother, now Mrs. Wyndham, returned to us with her husband, to take us with them from Boulogne to Dover, whence we were subsequently to repair to London.

I had never beheld Mr. Wyndham since the day of my father's death; and it might be supposed I should have betrayed violent emotion on his appearing; but it was not so; and what is more, I do not recollect any much acuter feeling than an uncomfortably-displeased—a sulkily-embarrassed—sensation on seeing him again.

CHAPTER V.

"Und so wuchs ich herauf, ein Ebenbild
Des Vaters, und es war mein stummer Blick
Ein bitt'rer Vorwurf ihr und ihrem Buhlen."

GÖTHE'S "IPHIGENIA."

I HAVE said that I was seldom seriously vexed, in my old home at Blendon, by my mother's evident preference for Emmeline; nor do I think I ever much heeded the tokens of it during my year of school-life at Boulogne; but since that had ceased, and I lived nominally on the same footing as my sister, the indifference I inspired,

being no longer counterbalanced by my father's notice, as of old, or by the variety brought about in my existence from learning and playing in company with others, produced a sullen coldness in my manners and feelings, likely enough to render the former permanently repulsive, and the latter harshly unamiable. I believe my step-father to have been, at first, sincerely desirous of conciliating me; and it is just possible that he might have succeeded in overcoming the painful associations with which he was bound up in my memory, had not the images stamped on that memory been, ever and anon, called into fresh life by certain reminders of the past, which seemed to break involuntarily from Jane Hickman.

One day, for instance, as I went into the nursery, not long after we were settled in town, I heard her saying, as if in rejoinder to some speech of Wilkins's:—

"Well, all I mean is, that poor master

that's gone was a kind friend to me and mine, and I can't bear his being forgotten."

There was a sort of pause, which was broken by my saying:—

"*I* don't forget papa."

A remark which provoked Wilkins to reply rather sharply:—

"Of course not; nobody does. What nonsense you put into the child's head, Jane!—Come this way, and get out Miss Emmeline's things, ready for her to put on."

Jane obeyed, but said calmly, while opening the wardrobe:—

"I know Miss Alswitha does remember her papa; but what I want her never to forget, is the things her papa taught her; always to speak truth, and never be afraid to do the right thing."

No more was said on the present occasion; but broken snatches of talk of a similar kind every now and then passed, so long as Jane

stayed with us, which was till her mother's bad health required the return of her only unmarried daughter to her cottage.

Her departure was a grief to me, and threatened to be an actual loss; for, situated as I was, it was of consequence that I should at least have some one to love in the house; and though there were, no doubt, disadvantages (which would have increased as I grew older) in the fact of my finding the chief object of my affections in a person of inferior condition, yet, even so, it was better than that I should live on without feeling, or exciting, any attachment whatsoever. I may, therefore, well be thankful that she was soon more than replaced by an instructress who was provided for me before I was quite eight years old, and who, while sufficiently educated to guide, was also cheerful and kindly enough to caress and amuse the shy and reserved child (for such I had become), who was to depend on her for so much more

than is usually claimed from a governess by her pupil. The authority deputed to her was almost without reserve; the main direction, the chief regulation given and insisted upon by my mother, being, that I should never be let out of her sight, nor permitted to run up acquaintances, by joining in the games of the children of the neighbouring families, who frequented the square where we generally walked.

My mother was obeyed to the letter; but, luckily for me, the spirit in which Miss Sherer construed her duties was far removed from the narrow severity, the unvarying strictness, she would have had so fair a handle for exacting, had she been inclined so to interpret the law she was to administer.

She was quite young—hardly eighteen, I believe—but used to children, and in the habit of teaching her little sisters; so that, being singularly amiable and unexacting, as well as possessed of that rare quality which

goes by the name of "common sense," she seemed sent on purpose (as far any human care and instruction could avail for that end) to rescue me from the absolute dominion of those faults of temper and character to which my position and nature rendered me liable. I had tolerable facility in learning, was used to obey my mother and Wilkins implicitly, and so found it no painfully hard task to conform to Miss Sherer's rules; especially as she let me chatter freely after lessons, and talked to me herself as good-naturedly as Jane, and more entertainingly. I became passionately fond of my instructress, and grew very nearly indifferent to Emmeline's being the pet in the drawing-room, seeing that I had now such a dear friend in the school-room.

I told Miss Sherer every thought that rose within me, with the single exception of those prompted by the reveries in which I occasionally cast back my mind on its recollections of

certain scenes at Blendon Hall.—An indefinable instinct disinclined me from relating them to her, though, I dare say that, had she *asked* me for any particulars of the time of my father's death, I should have told her all I remembered, and inquired of her what could be the meaning of much that was puzzling. I did not, however, scruple to talk to her of Godfrey, of his kindness to me, of his sudden departure and long absence, as also—in my childish way—of the faint, yet living hope I still entertained, of seeing him again some day. She listened with all the sympathy I could desire; she had herself a brother at sea, and she promised to try and find out the name of Godfrey's ship, in order thereby to learn when he came home again. This information I could no doubt have obtained through a more direct channel, had I ever dared to mention my brother's name before my mother; but it was always in her presence that I saw Mr. Halsey (a cousin of my father's—Godfrey's

guardian, who was also Emmeline's and mine, as concerned money matters), and I never did more than answer his questions, when solemnly brought forward for his inspection.

On the occasion of one of these visits, when I was about nine years old, I perceived, on entering the drawing-room, that some difference of opinion had been taking place, though on what subject I could not divine; for the only words I caught of my mother's were, "It's impossible," and the rejoinder, "It's a pity it should be so," could give me no information.

No more passed at the time; but Mr. Halsey, who, though grave and formal, was always very kind in manner, was more particularly so to me that day, observing that my regular settlement in a school-room of my own seemed to agree with me, and "that I should be a fine girl, after all, one of these days, if ever I got a little colour." "*If*," said my mother, with disdainful emphasis. "Ay, and even

if not," returned my father's cousin, examining me from head to foot; "she is a Lee all over, at any rate," added he. "*That* she certainly is," said my mother, drily. "Well, she can't do better than take after them," observed our visitor, who presently after kissed my forehead gravely, and took a somewhat ceremoniously polite leave of my mother.

I felt glad at heart to know I was thought "a Lee all over;" not that I was then sufficiently aware of the severe and peculiar style of beauty supposed to be hereditary in the race I came of, for my vanity to be excited thereby, but I was proud to think I was still like my father and Godfrey, of whom I knew I had been formerly thought a striking resemblance; and, moreover, I fancied that being "a Lee all over," I should not fail to be recognised by my brother, when and wherever I might meet him. I know not whether this pride and pleasure may

have been betrayed by some flash of my eye, or unaccustomed glow of my cheek; but, be that as it may, my mother observed (as if to correct any undue self-satisfaction I might have conceived) that "dear Mr. Halsey always thought his friends' children good-looking, but people in general were not given to admire girls who had no complexions. Now, Emmeline"—she stopped short and did not pursue the conversation farther, only observing to her husband, who had come into the room just after Mr. Halsey had left it, that "the good man had an odd taste of his own."

Mr. Wyndham made no particular answer, probably not quite understanding what she alluded to; but I, inspirited by what my relation had remarked, and at the same time unwilling to be supposed to over-value my appearance, went close up to them both, saying with as firm a voice as I could command: — "Mamma, I know Emmeline is

pretty, and I am not; but I *am* glad I am like Godfrey!"

I felt myself colour up at my own daring, and almost expected to be reproved and sent away; but no reproof came, though my step-father fixed his eyes on me with nearly as much surprise as if one of the chairs or tables had addressed him in human speech. He said not a word; and there was—I might almost call it—a scared expression on his countenance as he looked at me; then, turning suddenly away, he went and stood by the window, while my mother, to my extreme astonishment, inquired, what Miss Sherer had been telling me about my brother?

"Nothing, mamma. She knows nothing about him, I believe, except just what I have told her."

"Then, what made you think of him just now?" asked she.

"Why, you know, mamma, Mr. Halsey said—"

"Yes—yes—true," interrupted my mother impatiently; "you may go to Miss Sherer now."

I did so gladly, thinking, as I went, that if she imagined that I required the *naming* of Godfrey by Mr. Halsey to remind me of him, she could little know how much I loved my only brother; and I meditated a good deal that evening with intent to discover what had made her, as it seemed, guess that Miss Sherer and I had talked together about him. My meditations resulted in no discovery; and the two next days passed much as usual; but, on the third day from that of Mr. Halsey's calling, the footman brought into the school-room a letter come by the post for "Miss Lee!" I had never received one before in my life, and I trembled so with delight and eagerness that I could hardly open it. The writing within seemed made purposely larger than a grown-up person's usual running hand, and, with a little help

from Miss Sherer, I read the following lines :—

"MY OWN DEAR LITTLE SWITHY,

"My cousins here tell me that you are now an accomplished young lady, who can write copies and exercises, so I suppose you can read manuscript too, even when scrawled by me, and, therefore, use this means of inviting you to come on Thursday to dine at Mrs. Halsey's, where they all hope you will be able to manage spending an hour or two with your cousins and

"Your affectionate brother,

"GODFREY LEE."

A letter from Godfrey! Godfrey in England! Could it be really so? I asked my governess if she supposed he was staying with our relations?

"Yes, certainly," said she, pointing out

the date; but in truth she knew already —as I afterwards found—that he was there, the fact having a few days back escaped my mother, who begged her to take no notice of it to me, "for fear of its exciting me."

I next asked Miss Sherer "what I should do," for I was really too bewildered to form an idea for myself, and she said I must write an answer. A horror now came over me lest I might not be allowed to accept the invitation. I expressed this fear to Miss Sherer, and she told me "to take the letter at once to Mrs. Wyndham, saying, 'I may go, may I not, mamma?'"

I took the letter to my mother, and I believe I said the words, but before I had well brought them out, I became almost paralyzed at sight of the anger I had aroused, for my mother flushed scarlet, as she exclaimed:—

"If your brother cared to see you, he

might come here! I have no notion of your visiting people who cut your mother!"

I stood struggling to keep back my tears, and dared not trust my voice, so was presently asked impatiently "what I was waiting for?—did I not understand what had been told me?"

"Yes, mamma," replied I; "am I to say I mustn't go?"

"You need not say anything."

"Miss Sherer told me I must answer it."

"Miss Sherer knows nothing about the matter," rejoined my mother; "but," added she, with a certain hesitation, and an air of embarrassed reflection, "I will write myself to Mrs. Halsey, and explain the impossibility of your going."

I retired in great sorrow, and I do not know what would have become of me that day, had it not been for my kind governess, who listened to my tale of woe with a sympathy I shall ever feel grateful for, at the

same time that she religiously abstained from the slightest criticism on my mother's decision, which was assumed to be of the nature of a decree of fate, which we may lament, but cannot question.

My chief torment was lest Godfrey should think I had not tried hard enough to be allowed to accept; and my grief was somewhat mitigated by Miss Sherer's promising to let the Halseys know, through their governess, how grieved I was at the ill success of the invitation. I should observe that Miss Sherer knew the Miss Halseys' governess a great deal better than *I* knew my cousins; for, though Mr. Halsey came to see us pretty frequently, his wife seldom called more than once or twice in the course of the season, and never, by any chance, brought her daughters with her. It followed, therefore, that I was no more acquainted with the Miss Halseys than from knowing them by sight, and being

occasionally stopped by them when we were out walking, to be asked the sort of questions that tall school-room girls put to little ones when they wish to show them some kindness, and do not well know how. So that, without Miss Sherer's kind intervention, there was little hope of my ever making them aware of my inward feeling of gratitude to their mother for proposing the meeting I was so grieved to decline. But destiny proved, on this occasion, less cruel than it had threatened to be; for, as I made out next morning, it was not absolutely certain I should miss the sight of my brother, seeing that an answer had come from Mrs. Halsey to my mother's note, begging for a reconsideration of her decision, and this again had led to the exchange of some half-dozen politely-expressed epistles, the last of which, on Mrs. Halsey's side, included in her reiterated invitation to me both Miss Sherer and Emmeline.

I conclude that the refusals sent for me had been grounded, first, on my never being permitted to go anywhere alone, and, next, on the unsuitableness of Emmeline's being left at home without Miss Sherer; for, now that both these objections were obviated by the three being asked, my mother, after a long consultation with her husband (whom I heard remark "that they must not affront the Halseys, whatever happened,") let me know, albeit with evident unwillingness, that we were—as Mr. and Mrs. Halsey made such a point of it—to go next day to their house, in time for early dinner. My ecstasy knew no bounds; it would only have been more complete, had I been allowed to write the acceptation myself to Godfrey; but that was declared unnecessary, as my mother preferred sending a final note of her own to Mrs. Halsey, and I was a great deal too happy in my expectations for the morrow to be much discomposed at being denied

one of the accessory enjoyments to the grand delight awaiting me.

Next morning Emmeline had a slight cold, and I was in great terror lest we should all be kept at home on her account; but, though great lamentation was made over the necessity of her staying in the nursery with Wilkins when her sister was "going out," the plan was not altered as regarded Miss Sherer and me, there being, I conclude, much weight in Mr. Wyndham's axiom "that the Halseys were not to be affronted." They lived but a street or two from us, so that we walked thither, though we were to be fetched by the carriage, before my mother's drive in the afternoon.

The Miss Halseys were pleasing in appearance, and, though rather afraid of them, I was also very desirous at bottom of knowing more of them; so that, putting the meeting with my brother out of the

question, I should, at any rate, have thought it a great and desirable event to have an opportunity of seeing them in their own school-room; but that mingled feeling of pleasure and fear was now swallowed up by something far keener, and I had no time to think of shyness on entering, for the street-door was opened by Godfrey himself, who, taking me in his arms, carried me upstairs, kissing me all the way! I could hardly believe it was all real, and when my brother set me down in the drawing-room, and Mrs. Halsey was welcoming me, and introducing him to Miss Sherer (with whom he shook hands most cordially), I still felt very much as one does in a dream, till Godfrey began turning me round, to see how much I had grown, and asking "whether I should have known him?"

I looked up at him as he stood over me, taller and browner than ever, but not otherwise very different from my Blendon

Hall playfellow, and answered—I believe rather timidly—"Yes, brother."

I wanted to ask him, in return, "if he would have known me?" but it was so long since I had seen him that I felt strange; and, before I could bring out the words, dinner was announced, and we all adjourned to the dining-room.

I sat by Godfrey; he helped me to everything, he told me stories, and made me laugh, just as he had been used to do; but, though I laughed, and was so heartily merry, I could not speak much myself, for I remember feeling as if I could hardly venture to ask questions of such a great gentleman as I saw my brother had become, in spite of his being so kind, and smiling so exactly as he did of old. I learnt, however, what I had been wishing to ask before dinner; for I heard him tell Mrs. Halsey, that, "for all Swithy was so much grown, he should have known the little

puss anywhere;" upon which my cousins all began to abuse Godfrey at once "for calling me by that horrid name," and then proceeded—equally in chorus—to remark "how surprisingly like I was to the picture of their grandmother over the mantelpiece!"

I felt somewhat confused at having all eyes at table fixed on me; and when I ventured to lift up mine, and gazed at the old-fashioned garb and powdered head of Alswitha Halsey (born Lee), I was not especially flattered by the resemblance attributed to me; but I saw that my great-aunt's portrait was admired by her descendants, though *I* thought her look severe and her attitude stiff; so, on the whole, I continued well pleased to be "a Lee all over."

After we had risen from table, and were all lounging about the room, looking at this and that, Godfrey put his hand suddenly on my shoulder, saying:—"Alswitha, since that's

your name, you are rather too big to sit on my shoulder now-a-days, but I am going to show you my room for all that; so come along."

He was opening the door, and I was following, when Miss Sherer drew near, and, with a face flushed by the annoyance of having to enforce an ungracious regulation, compelled herself to say that "the condition of her pupil's being allowed to come had been *her* promising literally not to lose sight of her for a moment."

My brother's face darkened over, as I remembered its doing once at Blendon Hall, and he said sullenly, as he shut the door and let go my hand, "It's just like them!" but, conquering his temper in an instant, he cleared his brow, turned courteously to Miss Sherer, saying that "she was quite right to obey orders;" and added that "he was glad she had agreed to anything that allowed him to see his sister." "But," continued he with a

smile, "you won't be losing sight of Alswitha, will you, Miss Sherer, if I take her to the window for a bit, while my cousins tell you all you want to know about Madame Thing-a-bob's Academy?"

She looked assent; and while she and the Halsey girls stood talking by the fireplace, Godfrey drew me away to the farthest window, where, setting me on his knee, and looking me intently in the face, he said gravely:—

"Well, my own girl, how do you get on? Tell me!"

"I love Miss Sherer dearly, brother; she is *so* good to me!"

"That's right; mind you are good to her in return, and you'll do. Now, how do the others treat you?"

I paused, for I was not sure how I ought to reply; and I believe I answered something to the effect that "mamma was just the same as she always used to be;" and that "I seldom saw Mr. Wyndham except at dessert, when he

dined at home; but that he dined out much oftener than mamma did."

"Oh, he does, does he? I have heard as much," he muttered; and again his brow darkened angrily, and I felt a sort of awe creep over me as I looked at him, and waited for what he would say next. He began calmly however, though in a grave, serious tone:—

"Alswitha, dear, I believe you are as well off with your kind Miss Sherer as you can be where you are; thank God for that much! So all I have to say to you is, be a good girl till I come from sea next time—and—and—if I didn't come at all—or if I didn't see you for these ten years—mind, whatever you do, don't marry any of Wyndham's brothers or nephews, none of his seed or breed! I don't care what they do with Emmeline; that's their look out; but I won't have my father's daughter, or my father's inheritance, I won't have you and your money handed over to any beggar or knave of his tribe! Remember that, Swithy:

you *wouldn't be my sister* if you married a Wyndham!"

"I won't, brother! indeed I won't!" cried I, enthusiastically accepting the sole pledge I could give of my entire submission to the guidance of him I loved best in the world. He kissed me warmly in reply, saying "he thought he could trust me;" and as I nestled my head upon his shoulder, I was just beginning to collect courage enough to touch upon the mysterious past, was already about to put the whispered question, "Why was he sent away from Blendon?" when the sight of my mother's carriage, appearing at the end of the street, made him start up, and, leading me away from the window, join the party by the fireplace. It was soon announced that "Mrs. Wyndham was waiting in the carriage for Miss Sherer and Miss Lee."

My bonnet and mantle were hastily put on, my cousins and their mother took a kind leave of me, and, as Godfrey strained me

long and closely to his breast, I thought of the library at Blendon, and of my father's last embrace.

"Remember your promise!" he whispered, as he released me.

I was carried into the hall by Miss Sherer, and thence into the carriage, where my mother sat, during the whole drive, without speaking one word to either of us. In the evening I did nothing but talk of Godfrey to Miss Sherer, who, in her turn, gratified me by her praises of his frank, cordial manners, as well as of his lively countenance and distinguished appearance. I did not, however, confide to her the promise *he* had claimed, and *I* had given; for, though pleased, and not a little proud of having made an engagement which was to affect my conduct "when I came to be a woman," I had an instinctive feeling that Miss Sherer might think it rather absurd in me to be already

calculating, at nine years old, on what I should do when double that age. Besides, I recollected having once heard Miss Sherer observe that "Mr. Wyndham saw even less of his family than my mother did of hers," and, as I knew that this observation was perfectly correct, I was obliged to confess to myself that my firmness was not very likely to be put to the proof.

CHAPTER VI.

"Whom the gods love die young."

I HAD not been fond of Emmeline in my early childhood, our relative situations not having been *then* of a nature to foster mutual affection; but when, on old Wilkins's death, she was given over entirely into Miss Sherer's hands, she got rid of so many of her spoilt-child ways, and showed, under rational management, so much of the goodness and amiability of her natural disposition, that I became warmly attached to her, though she

never stood precisely in the rank of an equal companion to one who was older than she by three years in age, and by a great deal more in feelings. But I grew to look on her as an object of voluntary care and protection, rather than of compulsory attention; and, if I thought the amusements she best liked rather babyish for me, and even for her, I set down her backwardness in those respects, as well as in matters of education, to a real delicacy of constitution which I was bound to consider, and found no difficulty in making allowance for, now that she was no longer in the habit of fretfully claiming my compliance with her every fancy. She, in return, both appreciated my assistance in the small amount of lessons she was expected to do, and valued my endeavours to procure her as much amusement in play-hours as a child who had been so surfeited with toys was capable of enjoying; and when she found I could tell her, out of my books, more and prettier stories than

any one else in the house, she showed a marked preference for my society. I sometimes think my existence would have been a less troubled one, had she been spared; but, at all events, it was happy for *her* that she was taken, thus early, from a world in which she had as yet known no heavy sorrow, been proved by no severe trial. She had learnt to be docile, was religious in her childish way; whenever I now think of her, I am thankful for her sake that she is at rest; but her loss was dreadful to me at the time, especially as I was more absolutely without friends of my own age than would generally be supposed possible for a girl of fourteen, who lived, eight or nine months of every year, in a district of London inhabited by so many families corresponding exactly in rank and circumstances to my own. But it was not wished I should have acquaintances; and I now see that every arrangement had been all along silently made to bar my forming any. When

to the circumstance of my isolated situation is added that of my being totally unprepared for losing Emmeline, whom I had more than once seen recover from what seemed to me serious illnesses, my grief at her death may be conceived, and the void I felt in my home may be, in some measure, imagined. My mother was bowed to the earth by despair when her darling was snatched from her; but I did not seek to offer her sympathy—much less consolation—feeling as if she would probably regard any such attempts, on my part, as a kind of mockery. One day, however, that I was alone in the school-room, mournfully employed in collecting Emmeline's dolls, dinner-sets, &c., with the intention of giving them to Miss Sherer for a little sister of hers, while I put aside a miniature work-box and pin-cushion to keep for myself, as remembrances of their owner, the melancholy thoughts inspired by this occupation so overcame me that, unable to proceed with it,

I leaned my head on the table, which was covered with toys, and burst into a fit of sobbing and weeping, which, alone as I was, I did not attempt to control.

The door happened, however, to be ajar; and I suppose the sounds of sorrow were heard without, for, on raising my eyes at the approach of a footstep, I saw before me my mother, who had very rarely, even in Emmeline's lifetime, made her appearance in our school-room. She stood by the table, looking at me with a keen, searching glance; and then said, in a strangely-pitched voice:—

"I do believe you loved the child, Alswitha!"

"Oh, mamma, how could I help loving her?" cried I, with a fresh burst of grief; when, to my extreme amazement, she threw her arms round me, and, drawing me close to her, embraced me with a passionate warmth she had never before shown me.

I forgot for the moment my fear of her,

and the distance at which I had been always kept. I forgot even those shadowy impressions of the past, which had never ceased to be gloomily associated in my mind with early recollections of my mother, and I returned the pressure of her arms and lips with the eagerness of one who finds an unexpected vent for overpowering feelings, while she exclaimed aloud, but in a voice broken by emotion:—

"Alswitha, you are my only child now!"

Her life and mine might have been thenceforth very different, had we been left uninterrupted a few moments longer, to pour our sorrow into each other's bosom; but the door was—as I have said—open, and, there being only a narrow passage between the schoolroom and Mr. Wyndham's study, he became aware of what was passing, and before I could get breath to reply to my mother's ejaculation, he was standing in the doorway behind her, saying in a dry, cold tone, "Louisa, you

will do yourself an injury by giving way so completely: there is no use, either, in taxing Alswitha's sympathy to such a degree."

His voice was no sooner heard than I felt my mother's almost convulsive grasp loosen at once; she turned round towards him with a look more expressive of fear than of grief or affection; and she seemed to quail beneath his glance, as she disengaged herself from me. I, however, did *not* quail beneath the eye of the man who thus stepped between my mother and me; but, fixing mine steadily on his, I said, haughtily enough, that "no sympathy had been claimed from me." "What was there nearer me," I added, "than she who is gone?"

"Alswitha, Alswitha!" said my mother in a deprecating tone, as if she feared a quarrel between her husband and me.

"It is not the first time," observed Mr. Wyndham, "that she has chosen to misinterpret words of mine; but I don't wish

to recriminate. Come with me to your own room, my dear;" and he led my mother away, without her having, apparently, any power to express will or choice—to do anything, in fact, but passively yield herself to his guidance. When they were gone, I shut the door; and, flinging myself on the ground, gave myself up to those demons of wrath and bitterness who are but too ready to make their prey of a heart so little armed as was mine with the only shield that can avail against their might.

Miss Sherer was absent at her home for a day or two, having been worn out with the fatigue of nursing Emmeline; nor am I sure that—much as she always sought to influence me for good—her presence would on this occasion have allayed the storm that raged within me (though it might have tempered its outward tokens), for, having never fully known the whole bitterness of my feelings towards my step-father, she had neither

been able to probe my mind to the bottom, nor to attempt a remedy for its diseased state. However that might be, it is certain that on this afternoon, after I had well-nigh exhausted myself with the violence to which I yielded, in bewailing my subjection to the man who now stood before me more than ever as the evil genius of our house, I allowed myself, while stretched powerlessly on the floor, to recall, and minutely to examine in my troubled mind, all those circumstances of the last year I spent at Blendon Hall, which I had, of late, rather scrupled knowingly to summon back to my imagination.

I had, ere then, been visited, in spite of myself, by suspicions that my mother had, for a considerable time before my father's death, received secret as well as open visits from Wyndham; but it was not till this *dies iræ*, that I deliberately set myself to compare and combine with one another, and with subsequent events, every incident of days gone by,

which had been most mysterious to me, and that I fairly investigated the nature and connection of all I remembered and knew, by the help of a riper understanding, and a growing acquaintance with reality.

The employment was not a calming one; it resulted in darkening into convictions the suspicions I had deemed dreadful enough; yet, while I one moment gave reins to the hatred I felt justified in bearing to my father's treacherously successful rival, I asked myself the next, in loathing disbelief, "if these things could indeed be so?" or, if they were not perhaps the suggestions of some evil spirit, into whose power my angry passions had delivered me?

I rose from the ground shuddering; then I knelt and prayed to be forgiven for having thought so much evil; but my prayer ascended from too rebellious and unsubmissive a heart; for, even as I uttered it, my thoughts strayed back to Wyndham's stealthy

entrance, witnessed by me from my brother's room, to Godfrey's banishment (which I now explained to myself as being the sentence passed on him for what seemed a false accusation), and to those last words of my father's on the last day of his life, expressive of his too great certainty of his son's truthfulness. I remembered, moreover, my step-father's presence in our house on *that* 12th of September; the letters, the cabinet, my mother's eager appeal to him to "take her away," and Jane's assertion of having seen him in a disguise that same day, as well as "skulking about at other times!" The whole formed a chain, leading to conclusions from which there was no escape; and so soon as my mind had fairly admitted them, the perception instantly followed, that my father's death, albeit dealt by his own hand, should more justly be attributed to the false friend who had already destroyed his honour and his happiness. I wished, but wished in

vain, to stop the current of thought I had been tempted to open up, and by which I now felt as if I were being carried along, I knew not into what frightful abysses! I longed for Miss Sherer's return; I thought I had been comparatively peaceful, when, an hour or two back, I had sat bewailing Emmeline; but I could not, or would not, sacrifice—thoroughly yield up—all desire of revenge, all eagerness for proof of what I suspected! I have been punished, as one mostly is, for seeking the knowledge of evil —namely—by obtaining it.

For that evening, at least, I was not called upon to put restraint on my emotions, for I knew that I was not expected in the drawing-room, where the family solicitor was to pay a visit on business to my mother and her husband; so that I neither troubled myself to force my countenance into tranquillity, nor attempted any employment which might, in affording

the semblance, have perhaps brought about the reality of composure. In this mood I retired to bed, there to lie a prey to the same vultures of the mind, which had gnawed my bosom from the moment that Owen Wyndham had forbidden my mother to pour forth the anguish—perhaps the remorse —of her soul, in the arms of her who was now her only daughter. That such vultures should have had the power to lay their hold on a creature who was so young, and should have been so innocent, will appear impossible to some, dreadful to all; but I—though young in years, and in experience of some kinds, had been made, by a combination of circumstances, prematurely old in many respects; and I believe that my very seclusion from the society of youthful companions, my non-participation in many pleasures of early girlhood, had led me to take up different mental pursuits and interests, from those common among my equals in

age and apparent position. But, however this may be, my retired life had certainly strengthened in me the desire of penetrating the hidden springs of the real feelings and actions of my elders; a desire by no means rare in itself among children, but which had become in me a ruling and constant aim of the mind, instead of an occasional impulse.

I compared what I read with what I saw, and what I saw with what I read; and, as I never did read anything, of whatever nature, but with great attention, and a strong effort to understand it to the utmost, it followed that my ideas, and my powers of combining those ideas, were very much in advance of my age; and that I was then, and had long been, more qualified to "pick up" precise information from an unguarded look, or a broken sentence, than many a girl of seventeen, who had spent her time in jumping over daisy chains and playing at bass-ball with others. It was this quality, which, by enabling me to piece

together certain enigmatical speeches of Jane Hickman's, with a few observations that had escaped the Halseys' governess on the rare occasions when she had walked with ours, gave me the means of gleaning some facts, bearing directly on Mr. Wyndham's history; namely, that he was the "black sheep" of an otherwise honourable family, who had at one time utterly cast him off; that his place of abode, at the time when I must have first recollected him, had been a dilapidated shooting-box, near Blendon, where he lived, no one knew how or on what, and that he had at that period so won on my father by his engaging manners and plausible representations, as to obtain from him both countenance and substantial assistance in more ways than one, notwithstanding which he had continued to be what is called a "distressed man" up to the day of his marriage with his benefactor's widow. These things I knew; and as the powers of my mind developed, without my, in

any degree, losing the freshness of my recollections of Godfrey's banishment, or of the strange scenes to which I was subsequently a witness, they had been sufficient to fill my mind with a strong, though undefined, sense of evil. But now that my eyes were opened—now that I had, as it were, partaken of the fruit of the tree of knowledge—my wretchedness appeared to me unequalled, in being compelled to inhabit the house, to acknowledge the authority, of those to whom such suspicions attached; and I longed, with a longing like that of an exile for his home, to fly from mine—to cross sea and land to my brother, that we might, no matter whether on some burning strand or amid some troubled ocean, talk over our wrongs—perchance devise how we might avenge them!

I turned impatiently from side to side on my restless bed, as I asked myself when and where I might ever expect to see that beloved brother again? Five years had elapsed from

our meeting at the Halseys'; he had been in England since, but *they* had given up their town house, and *I* was helpless, weighed down, and fettered to the spot where fate had placed me!—and when Miss Sherer returned next day, she found me not only unhappy, as she had left me, but gloomily despairing and extremely unwell. Her surpassing kindness soothed me, and though I could not, and would not, reveal the true depths of my misery, still her sympathy with the sorrow she knew, gave me comfort, and I listened with a grateful endeavour at belief, when she said that "though I felt myself a desolate creature in heart and situation, now, the day would come when the advantages of person, fortune, and education I possessed would tell for my happiness," and that "life and youth had probably good things in store for me." I hearkened more heedfully, and with much secret compunction, to her observations—given in the gentlest manner—on the religious

duty of ruling my mind, and guarding it, to the utmost of my power, from all discontented and rebellious moods and trains of thought. I felt how much I had erred, confessed my fault in a general way, and inwardly blamed myself severely for having, the day before, wilfully rushed into such a sea of hateful conjectures. I now grew again doubtful of what I had deemed certain not many hours back, and I did try, in sincerity, to think less evil of those to whom I was subject. I partially succeeded, too, in my attempt, but I could not, with all my efforts, regain even the very moderate degree of serenity which had been mine before my step-father's interference of the preceding day had irritated me into putting him—and with him my mother—on their trial, as it were, in my own mind.

My inward struggles were great, and though they did not bring on downright illness, they affected my bodily state, for I grew thin and languid. My mother observed

my alteration with alarm; and between her fears, Miss Sherer's wish that "something should be done for me," and our apothecary's weariness of prescribing one draught after another in vain, it was agreed that "I wanted change," and that the best remedy that could be devised for my indisposition would be to take me abroad for the next twelvemonth. This being resolved on, nothing further remained to be done, except to consult Mr. Halsey, whose permission (though not absolutely necessary) it was, it seems, thought politic to obtain. He accordingly came to town for a day, called at our house, and, after listening to my mother's account of my state of health, delivered in my presence, he gave his approbation to the project, "as being," he considered, "the next best thing to my having leave to pass six months at his house in the country, or at my Uncle Haworth's." My mother answered with a certain degree of embarrassment, but in politely distinct words,

that "it was, henceforward, more than ever impossible for her to spare me, even to those who had the best claims, though she was not the less sensible of the kindness, friendliness, &c., that prompted his wish."

I saw I was never to visit my relations, but said not a word, and looked straight before me, till Mr. Halsey, knowing, I suppose, that he should not see me alone, informed me, exactly as if my mother had not been by, that he had heard from Godfrey, who was already, he said, in Europe, but not thinking of visiting England immediately. Again I thought, "Might I but chance to meet him on our travels!" which thought, as I had afterwards reason to suspect, was partially revealed to my mother, by my instantly asking the question:

"And where is he now?"

"Cruising in the Mediterranean for the present," was the reply; "he expects to be a good deal at Naples in the winter."

I made no further inquiry, and my

guardian soon after took his leave, saying, as he shook hands with me, that "he hoped to see me that time year all the better for my tour."

CHAPTER VII.

Miss Sherer, it had been already settled, was to spend the coming twelvemonth in the suburban home of her parents, where she was likely to be useful in many ways, and whence she expected to give lessons of music and "general instruction" in various families who were anxious to secure her services. I bade her farewell with extreme regret, for I was too much dispirited to look forward to any great pleasure in the wanderings, however

delightful in themselves, which awaited me in such uncongenial company; but nevertheless—such is the perverseness and inconsistency of human nature in general, or mine in particular—that when I found, on reaching Boulogne, that I was to be left at school there for a-year, instead of seeing Paris, Switzerland, and Italy, I had all the difficulty in the world to restrain the tears of disappointment which rose to my eyes! I did restrain them, however, for I was determined not to show vexation at missing a journey which I had bewailed to myself and to Miss Sherer, as forcing me into such close intercourse with Mr. Wyndham, and I was, in fact, ashamed of feeling the mortification I could not help experiencing. I therefore submitted to the decree without attempt at resistance, and assented, perhaps rather sullenly, to the opinion expressed by my mother, that "it would be much better for my improvement, in every respect, that I should remain stationary in a place where there were such excellent

masters of all kinds, than take a few drawing lessons in Paris, a few of music in Florence, and forget what I had learnt in both, while travelling hither and thither."

But, though my mother gave out this opinion, and though she always spoke as if the plan of leaving me at school, while she and her husband went on a pleasure tour, was the best and kindest that could have been devised, I had, even then, penetration enough to perceive that she was, in fact, not entirely a free agent in the matter, and that she certainly did not like what she was doing. My perception of this ought, perhaps, to have softened my feelings of irritation towards her; but I believe that, in truth, the sight only increased my bitterness against Mr. Wyndham, and my contempt for her weakness, who would yield up everything to such a man. With regard to *his* motives, I don't know what I believed *then*, but I do not *now* think he had deliberately perpetrated the species of deception that appeared to have

been practised upon me and upon Mr. Halsey.

I believe that he *had* intended me to share the tour that had been ostensibly planned for my benefit; but I also believe that my imprudent question of "Where is Godfrey now?" had alarmed my mother, that she had repeated my speech to her husband, who was yet more alarmed, and that he promptly decided—(it being clearly too late for them to change their minds and stay at home altogether)—on warding off chances and possibilities, by leaving me to "improve myself" at Boulogne. I am inclined to suspect, too, that—in addition to his chief and abiding dread of my having any communication with my brother—he had a minor fear, namely, that I should succeed to Emmeline's place in his wife's heart, and was, therefore, not ill-pleased to put an end to whatever might have the effect of drawing us together, lest she and I might one day join forces against him. There was not much danger of such

a consummation; but I suppose his consciousness of being neglectful—sometimes unkind—to my mother, made him fear a possible rebellion on her part; and it is certain that his ill-will to me, which only showed itself negatively during my sister's life, was thenceforth exhibited in a more active manner. The school selected for me was the same which I had attended as a day-scholar nearly eight years before; it was the most unexceptionable establishment in Boulogne, and not far from the dwelling of some English residents, with whom we had a degree of acquaintance. They were a rather vulgar, but very kind and perfectly respectable family; and they were sufficiently ready with their offers of service, to satisfy my mother, that in case of illness or difficulty of any kind, there were country-people of my own at hand, who might be relied on for befriending me. She and my step-father did not quit Boulogne immediately on my being placed with Madame le Gallois (I rather think it was

found expedient for my mother to write to Mr. Halsey, in a manner to give him the notion that they, as well as I, were to stay a considerable time where we were); but at the end of about three weeks they came to see me together, asked me "if I were well off and comfortable?" were answered somewhat coldly in the affirmative, and took leave of me as being on the eve of departure—Mr. Wyndham with a forced show of interest, my mother with an appearance of emotion I believed to be sincere, yet could not heartily respond to. The fact was, that I found myself considerably better off, in my French school, than I had expected to be; and, reflecting how vain and vague was the idea I had for a moment conceived, of stumbling upon Godfrey in Italy, had already come to the conclusion that to stay learning lessons at Boulogne, among merry girls of my own age, was a preferable mode of passing a year, to that of going about seeing all that was most worth seeing in the

world, with the companionship of persons whose presence always poisoned what might have been pleasurable.

My health returned as soon as I was transplanted to a sphere so absolutely contrary to that in which I had been latterly pining; and, as I was strong enough in constitution, and independent enough in habits, not to mind the differences (as regarded luxury and attendance) between my home and the uncarpeted apartments of Madame Le Gallois' house, I was able, after the first day or two, to feel real relief in having my thoughts and attention forced into a more wholesome channel than they had run in for some time.

The French I had learnt of old in that same establishment had been kept up by regular instruction ever since, so that I easily regained my childish fluency of speech in the language of those I was among; and if I had

at first some difficulty in conforming in all things to school routine, I had (besides being really well taught) readiness enough to enable me shortly to make what wits and knowledge I had tell advantageously, though by different processes to those I was used to.

I was literally not allowed to retain the shyness with which I originally appeared among the girls; for Eugénie Le Gallois, daughter of the schoolmistress, flew to welcome me, declaring she remembered my taking my first French lesson, and, after kissing both my cheeks, proceeded to present me in form to all the rest, as a fellow-pupil who would be an acquisition to their little society, and whom they were to help and entertain to their utmost, both as a stranger, and as one who required "distraction" for the melancholy to which she had been lately a prey. The speech seemed to me rather flowery, and the whole scene rather theatrical; but Eugénie was so good-hearted, as well as so

pleasing in looks and manners, that I grew soon reconciled to what would have struck me as factitious and over-demonstrative in a countrywoman of my own, and gave myself up to the new pleasure of exchanging ideas and views with one nearer to me in age than any with whom I had ever yet been immediately thrown.

Her being a trifle older than I, just equalized us enough for mutual enjoyment of each other's company, as I was by disposition graver and more reflecting than she, besides having gone through a kind of education calculated to repress in a great degree whatever natural liveliness I had been endued with. Two more contrary beings in turn of mind, in manner of viewing and estimating things and persons, could scarcely exist; and yet, through sheer sympathy of youth, and attraction exercised each on the other by means of contrasting qualities, we suited better than I should have imagined it possible, had just

such a pair been described to me beforehand. Eugénie was well principled, and desirous of improving in all respects, because that pleased her mother, and would lead to her getting on the better in life; but, though quick and ready in speech, she was as thoroughly matter-of-fact in the nature as she was limited in the range of her ideas; and the desire, the thirst, for knowledge of any kind (for its own sake) was so foreign to her mind as to be incomprehensible to her, even when the existence of that thirst in the souls of others was forced on her perception. She liked me, because she was able to show me kindness, which was a genuine pleasure to her, and because I was, in her eyes, handsomer than most of her other friends (possessed at least a style of features and countenance which she prized as rare),—and her mother liked to see our intimacy, because she thought that I, or my connections, might be of service to her daughter in recommending

her to an advantageous situation in some wealthy English family, where she was meant to earn her living as governess, till such time as enough had been saved from the profits of the school and her own gains to make up the respectable dowry that would admit of her marrying creditably in her own rank of life.

All this plan concerning the situation in England, the dowry, the marriage, and the kind of husband to be bargained for, was related to me by Eugénie herself, in a cool, business-like fashion which amazed me, though I had often read, and been told, how such matters were managed abroad. The two or three English girls at Madame Le Gallois' listened either with sentimental indignation, or contemptuous amusement, whenever Eugénie's prospects were mentioned; but I, piquing myself a little on being unshackled by national prejudices, and thinking the representations of my countrywomen there present missish and affectedly

romantic specimens, would not allow that those who submitted to such customs must be necessarily more worldly and interested than those who pursued the same ends by different means; and I grew so fond of Mademoiselle Le Gallois in the course of a few months, that (egged on, it is true, by some hints from her mother) I even ventured, in writing to mine, to ask if I might, on our return to London, offer our company and protection, during the journey, to the young person I was desirous of befriending, and afterwards afford her hospitality in our house, till she should have found what exactly suited her, in that of some person whose children required her instructions.

I received in course of time an answer from my mother, then at Florence, consenting much more frankly to this proposal than I had at all expected and informing me, at the same time, that her (and consequently my) stay on the Continent was to be prolonged, by

several months, beyond the year originally contemplated. This delay would not, she hoped, either disappoint me or inconvenience Mademoiselle Le Gallois; nor did it so at all; for Eugénie was not sorry to have some longer time allowed her in her home, while I, having literally no one in my own country to whom I was strongly attached, except Miss Sherer, was really glad to remain, even for an indefinite period, in a place where, however strict and unchanging the routine might be, I was at least far from my step-father, and thus able to shut out the hateful speculations which his presence was so apt to set working in my mind. I no more forgot them, in the literal sense of the word, than I had ever forgotten the childish reminiscences on which they were mainly grounded; but I had ceased to brood over them, and dreaded heartily whatever might lead to my again taking up the habit of doing so. They were, however, through force of association, recalled for a space to my

mind, when I was given one day by Mrs. Johnson (the English lady to whom I had been in a manner recommended) a letter forwarded by Mr. Halsey, and written to me some time back by Godfrey. It was kindly expressed, and longer than most young naval officers would have troubled themselves to write to an almost unknown sister; yet, it would be difficult to say why, the reading of it caused me a sort of blank feeling I could not account for to myself. Whether it were that the calmly affectionate sentiments it gave token of seemed a cold return for the vehement eagerness with which *I* longed to see and speak to him, or whether it were that I instinctively perceived in the letter a sort of preoccupation, indicating that the mind of the writer was possessed by some far stronger interest than I could inspire, I know not; but such was its effect; and when I set about answering it, I was chilled, and constrained by doubt, as to how much of my thoughts and

wishes he might now care to have imparted to him.

One of his opening sentences showed me that Mr. Halsey must have told him I had become of much more importance to my mother since Emmeline's death; and Godfrey's mode of observing upon this led me to think he was not only much relieved by imagining me likely to have become happier in my home than formerly, but that he also supposed me to be probably too well off ever to require his putting himself forward to assist or protect me. He said he hoped to spend a good deal of the coming winter at Naples, where he had various friends, and was especially intimate with the family of his late captain's brother-in-law, "charming people, whom he wished I knew," but whose name he did not mention.

"Perhaps," thought I, "he is going to marry one of these 'charming people,' and then, if all I hear people say is true, he will

be far too much taken up with his own concerns to think about me, as I do of him!"

Still I wrote, told him how disappointed I should have been not to accompany my mother into Italy, had I had the least chance of being allowed to meet him there, asked if he had enjoyed himself as he expected during the winter, inquired the name of the friends he valued so much, and besought him, if he went to England in the spring through France, to make Boulogne his crossing point, so as to come and see me either at Madame Le Gallois', or Mrs. Johnson's, both whose addresses I carefully gave him.

I sent this epistle in rather a roundabout way, to ensure its ultimately reaching him, enclosing it to Mr. Halsey, who, I knew, would not fail to forward it correctly; and then, after some weeks had elapsed, began hoping for a reply to it. But none came; the spring was succeeded by summer and autumn, without my hearing from or seeing Godfrey;

and finally, about the beginning of winter, my mother and her husband returned from their travels, came to Boulogne, and took me and Eugénie Le Gallois with them to our London home.

CHAPTER VIII.

My young friend's presence in the house was a most useful help towards my "breaking myself in" to passable endurance of all I had been released from for eighteen months; and, as there was, for the first few weeks, a great deal of driving hither and thither to show her sights, as well as to convey her to and from the abodes of various great and little ladies, whom she had to visit in quest of a situation, my existence was considerably less dull than I

ever remembered its being, within the space of my London recollections.

I was not—it could hardly be expected I should be—on any more intimate footing than formerly with my mother; but I was now not nearly so often blamed as I used to be for trifling awkwardnesses or mistakes; and Mr. Wyndham, who had—as I was by this time well aware—so systematically hindered my having the opportunity of making a friend among my cousins and neighbours, seemed rather to approve of, than to object to, my friendship with Mademoiselle Le Gallois. The fact was, he had not the same fears as to what I might tell to, or hear from, a foreigner with regard to our family history, as he had of what might pass in any close intercourse between me and an English companion; which calculations of his had, at least, the fortunate result of rendering him good-natured in everything that concerned Eugénie's stay with us.

It followed, therefore, that when, after a

careful search, there presented itself what seemed a most eligible situation for her, burdened, however, with the difficulty of the family's not being ready to receive her till the middle of June, the knot of the business was cut at once, by her being invited to prolong her visit up to the day when Lady Dashwood's present governess was to leave her, her ladyship's only stipulation being that "Mademoiselle Le Gallois was *not* to learn English in the meantime."

I was delighted with this arrangement, which, for the time being, laid the various ghosts that had so fearfully haunted my imagination before I went to Boulogne; and I was, moreover, too glad, both for her sake and my own, to share my lessons of drawing and Italian with Eugénie, who was grateful for the advantages afforded her, and anxious to make the most of them, though I never thought she had much love of art, far less any real admiration for the romantic poetry, to reach the

fountains of which was *my* chief object in studying the sweet Tuscan tongue.

Still we were happy, learning together, and chattering together between whiles; nor were we the less so from the return to her place in the school-room of Miss Sherer, who now came back to me more as a superintendent of my occupations, and a companion of my morning walks, than as a literal governess. She had tact and good-nature enough to refrain from any criticisms on the young French girl whose company enlivened me; knowing well that all my faults were of a nature absolutely contrary to those infirmities of vanity and over-pliancy with which the society of my new friend might have infected one of a different disposition to mine; and she soon saw that my confidence was still as exclusively hers as it had been formerly. Eugénie was, with all her good-nature, incapable of entering into more than the one-half of my feelings; and her astonishment at the other half, which ap-

peared to her so peculiar, found frequent vent in the exclamation, "C'est singulier comme vous avez peur de madame votre mère!" "Et pourtant," she generally added, "vous n'avez jamais craint les maitres chez nous! ni même, Mademoiselle Du Gué" (the strictest and sharpest-tempered of the teachers in her mother's school). Neither could she—when in the course of the following spring I received from Godfrey the announcement of his marriage—in the least understand why the news should excite in me the emotion which burst forth in a flood of tears.

"Etait-ce donc un très mauvais parti? Did I know anything to the disadvantage of the bride, or her family?"

No—I knew nothing of the kind, and had no distinct reason to give for thus weeping over an event which I concluded to be for my brother's happiness. But though Eugénie was sincerely sorry to see me so overcome, and did her best to dissipate my melancholy fit, it

was from Miss Sherer only that I received full sympathy, for she alone comprehended the mingled feelings that oppressed me.

Concerning the marriage, in itself, I did, indeed, know little; nothing in fact beyond the very few details given by Godfrey respecting his bride, whose age he stated to be twenty, whose name was Christine, and who was the second daughter of General Murray, of Heatherbank. He apologized briefly for having left my Boulogne letter nearly a twelve-month unanswered, saying, that "if I knew all the worries and perplexities that had been vexing his mind—which he now hoped would know peace and rest—he believed I should forgive his seeming neglect of me;" but he gave me no hope of seeing him soon, "as, even when in England, he was unlikely ever to be a day in London," though he added towards the conclusion, that "now he looked forward to having a home of his own—*some*where—he also looked forward to my being—*some*

day—of age, and consequently free to pay him a visit, which he knew would please my new sister as much as it would himself."

I answered him immediately, giving him every wish for his happiness, and expressing my eager wish that five years and some months should make haste and slip by, if the end of that term was indeed to afford me such a pleasure as he had assumed it would, and as I had been longing for during such a weary time.

But it was not till some days after I had sent my congratulations, that (in reading his letter over again, before locking it up in my most secret treasure-casket) I perceived in the corner of one of its foldings the following words:—

"Don't forget your old promise, now you are growing into a woman, Swithy!"

It is not to be conceived, or expressed, how grieved and vexed with myself I was, to have taken no notice of this in my answer! It

was the one token of his being still alive as ever to the peculiarity of my situation, to the sorrows and losses he and I had suffered in common, and I had failed to avail myself of the means it gave me to recall—to impress—on my brother, my submission to his will, my dependence on his affection, in spite of all the time and space that divided me from him! I had neglected this, too, at the very moment when I was most anxious to keep his remembrances of me fresh and strong enough to endure through the life of more absorbing cares and affections on which he was entering!

There was no help for it, however; for the time was elapsed after which a letter from England would have found him there, whence he had written to me, and he had not told me whither he was about to travel; besides which consideration, I should have felt awkward and ashamed in setting myself to compose a letter expressly and visibly for the sake of answer-

ing that one short sentence. So I tried to think no more of what might, after all, be of little importance, and succeeded best in chasing it from my mind, when I was listening to Eugénie's lively chat, or playfully arguing with her against the matter-of-fact views of life which, I must say, she often supported with as much of ready wit as of calculating precision.

At school, in France, when discussing the grand subject of marrying and giving in marriage with the English girls there, I had generally taken up French views; but now, in my *tête-à-têtes* with Mademoiselle Le Gallois, I was apt to lay before her, at some length, all the reasons, sentimental, expedient, and moral, which I thought made most for the usual English opinions and customs on those points.

"Comme cela-donc," said Eugénie to me once, after I had endeavoured to explain to her what I believed to be the process of a

young lady's "trouver à se marier" in this country, "il faut d'abord connaître assez de monde pour qu'on vous choisisse, et pour que vous puissiez choisir ensuite parmi ceux qui vous recherchent; mais, si on ne connait personne — presque personne — que fait-on alors? Reste-t-on pour la façon?"

I acknowledged that such was the probable fate of damsels so situated.

"Dans ce cas-là," proceeded she, after a reflecting pause, "sans doute que Madame Wyndham donnera l'année prochaine de grands bals, fera inviter tout plein de gens de la haute volée par cette Mme. Stratton, qu'on voit quelque fois ici; car, autrement, je ne vois pas comment elle pourra réussir à vous marier."

I told her I had no notion that any such exertions would be made for my benefit (I did *not* tell her I had begun to suspect my mother was only partially visited), and, anticipating her exclamations of horrified amazement, I

went on to say that I did not expect ever to marry.

"What! not with my fortune, my connections, and personal advantages! It was impossible my mother should neglect using the means customary in her country for producing an end she must desire. True, she was this year scarcely recovered from the effects of the loss of her youngest daughter, but next spring she would, of course, take measures for giving me the power to find an establishment."

I replied, more bluntly than I intended, that "I did not believe it was wished I should obtain one."

Eugénie opened her eyes wide; then composed her countenance as if she were, out of discretion, reining in something she had been tempted to say; and, finally, after some moments of silence, observed, with a sly smile, that "perhaps, for all my belief that such things were never so managed in England,

there might be a husband—a suitable match, of course—ready looked out for me, who would appear some day unexpectedly, and I should think, no doubt, if matters were but properly contrived, that he had dropped down from the clouds, as lovers did in romances."

I answered, drily, that the thing was simply impossible, and that I did not wish it to be possible; my mind was made up.

"C'est très-bien, ma chère," said Eugénie, with an arch look, "c'est très-bien; mais enfin, nous verrons!"

And with this "nous verrons," and the same knowing glance, constantly repeated, she replied to all I could say in confirmation of the opinion I had advanced, till I left off speaking, in utter despair of convincing her.

"De deux choses l'une," said she to me another day, "ou Madame votre mère a l'intention de recevoir chez elle l'année prochaine, de manière à vous faire voir beaucoup de monde, ou bien, sans que vous vous en

doutiez, elle arrangera tout doucement quelque mariage, qui s'annoncera un beau jour, sans qu'on fasse tous les embarras qu'il faudrait pour vous établir, si on s'y prenait de l'autre façon."

I told her, smiling, that she was welcome to form her own ideas; and for that morning put an end to the subject, which, however, I resumed with Miss Sherer later in the day, when we laughed not a little at Eugénie's notion of the manner in which I was probably to be disposed of, and, also, at the proof this notion gave, of her thorough conviction that she knew more about English habits and customs than we did ourselves.

There was another point which Eugénie every now and then discussed, when alone with Miss Sherer and me (she was fortunately too much in awe of both "Monsieur et Madame" Wyndham, to enter upon it before them), and that was the strangeness of the English, in isolating themselves so entirely

from their relations; and certainly, if Eugénie Le Gallois, like many another traveller, assumed that to be the universal custom, which she found the practice of one household, she had grounds for an opinion which I never attempted to controvert, though Miss Sherer sometimes did. *I* knew, or suspected, at any rate, some of the causes of that isolation, which, if not so thorough as it had been, was still remarkable enough.

I remembered my own astonishment years back, on learning—by the fact of his going to the funeral—that my step-father's father, Colonel Wyndham, had been up to that period alive. I was aware, also, in spite of my knowledge of certain visits, few and far between, paid *after that time* by Mr. Wyndham to his mother, that *she* had never been within our doors. Her health was very bad, I was told, and she never stirred from the country; but that could not be the case with her numerous married daughters, with none of whom we

were as yet acquainted. What younger brothers or nephews Mr. Wyndham might have, I knew not; and, even if, as I was inclined to believe, they *were* the set of "beggars and knaves" Godfrey had warned me against, they certainly had not, hitherto, put themselves in my way by visiting at the house of their eldest brother. Mr. Edward Wyndham and his wife had, a couple of years back, called on my mother just before they returned to India; so that Mrs. Stratton and her husband were about the only persons, among my step-father's relations, of whom we saw much.

Mr. Halsey, who had always performed his duty to the daughter of his deceased kinsman strictly enough, called whenever he was in town, and whenever business required it. But that was not very often; and, though my mother's only brother, Mr Haworth, had visited his sister pretty frequently that spring, Eugénie had had sharpness enough to observe,

that his wife came very seldom, and that we were not at all intimate with his family.

That we should live in a handsome house in a fashionable situation, filled with splendid furniture, and provided with every appointment of table, attendance, horses, carriages, &c., and yet see little general society, was not so surprising to Eugénie, who had heard that the English were fond of retirement, and who, besides, accounted for every peculiarity of *that* kind by "le chagrin de Madame Wyndham à cause de la perte de cette pauvre petite," but the absence of a "family circle" was what she could not get over.

"Vous autres Anglais, vous êtes donc comme des loups!" was her frequent remark, and I never heard it without feeling the blood rush to my cheeks. Eugénie perceived it once, and I believe she attributed it to my feelings of nationality being possibly hurt through her observations!

As spring advanced, I was a good deal sur-

prised at being asked, without any event seeming to lead to it :—

"Whether I should like to ride?—to ride in the Park of an afternoon with Mr. Wyndham? As, if so, a horse would be got for me."

The temptation was great. I had learnt to ride as a child, during our yearly recurring summer and autumn sojourns at watering-places, on which occasions Miss Sherer and I used to go out more days than not. I was very fond of the exercise, which would not be rendered less pleasant by being enjoyed among the gay throngs in Rotten Row, and it required all my abhorrence of my step-father to enable me to reject the offer of such a pleasure, because I must receive it as an obligation and kindness from him. But I had never, when a little girl, walked or ridden with him; and to begin accepting him for my *chaperon* now, for my own ends, after having for nearly two years past believed myself justified in re-

garding him with redoubled aversion, appeared to me a piece of meanness, and I told my mother I had no wish for riding in London.

"That means," said she, bitterly, in reply, "that you will not take the slightest favour from Mr. Wyndham, just to be more free to yield yourself up to your unjust and ungrateful prejudices."

I replied that "I could not help the interpretation my decision received," and retired forthwith to the school-room, where Miss Sherer blamed me for being too much guided by what she called "a natural, but ill-advised, and not very Christian feeling of pride," while Eugénie plainly told me I must be fast losing such senses as I had ever had, if I persisted in refusing such an offer!

"I who was," she had heard, "such a good horsewoman two years back, and who would look so well 'en Amazone.'"

Persist I did, nevertheless, though Mr. Wyndham expressed next morning at break-

fast pretty nearly the sense of what Mademoiselle Le Gallois had said in the schoolroom, adding in conclusion, as he looked me over from head to foot in a manner which was new to me from him, that "I should never be younger to do what I *had* professed to enjoy so much, and should hardly get handsomer than I was already."

This sort of by-the-way compliment, though not very pleasing to me in the lips it came from, showed me, at least, that Mr. Wyndham and my mother had now so far changed their opinion of my exterior as to think I should rather do them credit than the reverse. I knew that, though tall of my age beforehand, I had grown considerably during my year and a-half in France, and, having heard no more since then of the remarks so often made previously, on the unfitness of this or that colour, or mode of head-dress "for Alswitha's complexion," or "Alswitha's features," I drew the conclusion, that it was perhaps not only Eu-

génie's love of whatever contrasted with her own appearance, that had made her sometimes exclaim,—

"C'est singulier comme elle est belle par fois, cette Alsidie!—dans son genre à elle."

These things combined somewhat shook my hitherto fixed opinion as to the deliberate intention of secluding me from general society, as much as could be done by the force of *vis inertiæ*, and I began privately to wonder whether those on whom I depended might not, after all, think fit to "take me out" like other girls at last.

To do so would be inconsistent; but then people *are* so inconsistent! And I speculated a great deal more on the subject than I should have liked anyone else to guess; for, in fact, though I would not have, visibly, stirred a finger to get myself introduced into the world, I was far from indifferent to the notion of its pleasures, provided I might taste them without showing what I considered a degrading

eagerness, or buying them with compliances for which I should have despised myself.

It was, therefore, with no inconsiderable flutter of pleasure and undefined expectation that I hearkened to the announcement, made me in a dry and business-like manner enough, that "Mrs. Stratton was going to give a party, and that, on account of its being at the house of a connexion, I should be allowed, though not yet introduced, to accept the invitation."

The middle of June had now arrived; the dance—for that was the nature of the party—was to take place at the end of the month (just within a few days of my sixteenth birthday); and my only vexation was, its being fixed for the evening *after* Eugénie would have left us for Lady Dashwood's, and its being consequently voted unsuitable and imprudent to make any disarrangement of plans for the sake of taking her with us to the Strattons'. I bewailed this provoking state

of things vehemently to my young friend, who bid me not distress myself a moment on her account, and excited my surprise and admiration by the perfect good humour with which she bore what I knew must be tantalizing to one so fond of dancing and amusement of every kind, putting out of the question her curiosity to see what kind of an affair an English ball might possibly be.

"Vous êtes trop bonne, chère Alsidie!" said she, kissing me affectionately; "ce n'est vraiment pas la peine de vous affliger comme cela; d'autant plus qu'il vaut peut-être mieux pour moi, ne pas mettre le nez parmi tout ce beau monde-là, à la veille de commencer à gagner mon pain. Ce ne serait peut-être pas un bon préparatif (on m'a déjà tant gâtée ici!); et puis, je ne trouverais point à me marier, moi, chèz Mme. Stratton."

"Nor I neither, as far as that goes!" replied I, laughing; "but you are a dear, good, sensible creature to take this as you do."

"I have little merit in that," said she; "for you it is altogether a different affair."

And when I tried again to convince her that my prospects were not so very different from hers as she assumed, she began anew with her "nous verrons," and her look of arch intelligence, till I thought it as well to propose playing a duet, by way of putting an end to all discussion on such subjects.

The next few days were busy ones; for I was buying presents for Eugénie, and having my first Tarlatane gown tried on, while she was putting all her wardrobe carefully in order, packing it artistically, and writing letters to her relations in France.

Her preparations were nearly complete, when one morning, about two or three days prior to her departure, as I was sitting sadly enough in my own room, I was astonished by the entrance of Eugénie, almost stifling with her efforts to repress a convulsion of laughter.

"What *is* the matter?" cried I; "there

really do not often occur such very amusing incidents here! Make haste and tell me, Eugénie."

She composed herself, not without difficulty; and, seating herself by my side, said, with a look of childish mischief in her eye:—

"Eh bien, ma chère, j'avais raison! On vous marie, et c'est chez Madame Stratton qu'aura lieu l'entrevue."

My first impression was, that Eugénie had gone out of her mind; my second, that she had been mystified through some blunder into which her imperfect knowledge of English had led her; but on cross-questioning her strictly, I found to my amazement—I may add to my horror—that there was a foundation, and no slight one, for her assertions. It was, indeed, as good as proved to me, that the object of my being taken to Mrs. Stratton's ball was, there to introduce me to Mr. Wyndham's youngest brother. *He* was expected to be "charmed with me," while I, it was supposed,

could not fail to be captivated by one so graceful and handsome as this young Wyndham was universally considered!

The manner in which Eugénie had become aware of the plan was briefly this: she had been, an hour or two back, called down to the "little drawing-room" to help my mother with her ingenuity, in some difficulty which had arisen about a piece of carpet-work, with which she was still busied when Mrs. Stratton was announced. Eugénie rose to withdraw, but being begged to remain and finish what she had begun so cleverly, she complied, and was for some time too much taken up with the intricacies of a pattern which had not been very correctly drawn, to give any attention to what was going on between the two ladies, who had removed themselves into the larger room, and were carrying on their discourse in English. Now Eugénie, in obedience to Lady Dashwood's wishes, had never *learnt* any English; but she had (as *I* knew,

though my mother did not) "picked up" an amount that was surprising under the circumstances, and when the pattern became more easy, and she heard my name repeatedly mentioned, curiosity sharpened her powers of comprehension, and she took in the whole, or nearly the whole, of a conversation, not one syllable of which she was supposed capable of understanding. Minor details she had not been able to follow; and there was something about the impossibility—for such it seemed to be—of the young man's visiting at his brother's house, which had been quite unintelligible to her, though she had had little difficulty in laying hold of the main facts.

In relating all this, Eugénie repeated (with her own pronunciation of the same), so many of my mother's peculiar phrases, and of Mrs. Stratton's also, that I could not for a moment suspect her of endeavouring to palm off a fiction on me for the fun of the thing; and I sat petrified by the discovery that I actually

was called upon to decide whether I would or would not keep the promise I had made Godfrey seven years back!

I hesitated not a moment, determining instantly to give up the ball, cost what it would; but I sat silent, pressing my hands tightly together, and looking straight before me, till Eugénie, surprised at my demeanour, exclaimed:—

"Mais qu'avez vous, donc, ma chère? Cela n'a pas l'air de vous amuser!—et cependant je vous assure—"

I interrupted her by thanking her gravely for the information she had procured me, adding, that my only embarrassment lay in the difficulty of carrying through, and accounting for, my change of intention, without subjecting *her* to blame.

"Could I really meditate not going?" she asked, in astonishment.

"I shall certainly not go," was my reply.

"Mais vous êtes par trop romanesque!"

cried she, with more approach to anger than I had ever seen her kindled with towards me; "et on dit que c'est un jeune homme charmant, tout le portrait de ce qu'était à son âge monsieur votre beau-père."

"Then I'm sure I should hate him!" I burst forth, vehemently.

"C'est que sur ce chapitre-là, s'il faut que je vous le dise, vous n'êtes vraiment pas raisonnable, ma cherè!—mais après cela," continued she, more calmly, after a pause of reflection, "si vous n'en voulez veritablement pas—ne vous inquietez pas sur mon compte; car si Madame votre mère se fâche, cele me fera sans doute de la peine,—mais du reste, elle n'ira pas conter à Lady Dashwood que j'ai fait l'écouteuse, et je n'en ferai pas moins bien mes affaires; de sorte que ce n'est point à moi qu'il faut penser—je suis pourtant désespérée de ce que j'ai fait, car si vous vous obstinez à voir la chose dans le jour où vous la voyez, il s'ensuivra que j'aurai fait manquer votre

mariage; pas plus que ça!" and the good-hearted, though thoughtless, girl shed tears of remorse and vexation, for having—as she considered it—injured my prospects through ignorance of the reality of those freaks of mine, the expression of which she had always looked on as a mere English "façon de parler."

I assured her I was grateful for the warning given me; and I was beginning to reflect again on how I should so proceed as to guard Eugénie from falling into complete disgrace, and yet act up to my own principles, when a summons to come down to try on some flowers, which were to complete my costume at Mrs. Stratton's, hastened my decision, and, without allowing myself time to get frightened at what I was about to do, I went straight up to my mother, who stood with the artificial garland in her hand, and said:—

"Mamma, I am very sorry so much trouble has been taken for me, but that wreath had

better go back at once, for I would rather not go to Mrs. Stratton's party."

It would be long and wearisome to detail the dialogue that followed. Suffice it to say, that I was forced, by direct and searching questions, to assign my true reason, and to confess—most unwillingly—that I owed my information to Eugénie. She was, of course, called a mischief-maker and a misrepresenter —a misunderstander, at best—of what had really passed; but the extreme anger and mortification shown, as well as the almost coaxing tone employed to induce me to think better of my intentions, convinced me that her story was a perfectly correct one.

When my mother found I was not to be persuaded, she asked sarcastically :—

"Why I should make so sure of young Wyndham's falling in love with me? It was not a thing that followed necessarily."

I was far from thinking it; but I knew that my fortune, though no ways entitling me

to be esteemed an heiress, might be considered especially since the half of Emmeline's had—been added to it—a very fair bait for one so needy as I had been led to believe all the Wyndhams were; and I expressed my opinion more bluntly than prudently.

My mother grew pale with anger, and, calling Mr. Wyndham, told him in my presence of my disobedience. He turned to me with a look of concentrated rage, but spoke in his usual calm tone, while he bid me "reflect before I decided, for he should not allow my mother to give way to all my caprices, and if I would not go where she chose to take me, neither should I be taken where I might fancy myself." In other words, if I would not accompany her to the Strattons' on this occasion, I was not to expect to be introduced into society at all, but might live on in my school-room, passing youth in the same seclusion and monotony as childhood.

I perfectly understood the choice set before

me, but my pride was roused to so high a pitch, that it was neither hypocrisy, nor yet indifference to worldly pleasure, that dictated my words, as I replied steadily, that "I accepted the penalty at once, and had no need to reflect."

He bade me take notice that "he also accepted my defiance of him, and that I must not complain hereafter of my advantage being neglected."

"I am not likely to complain," returned I, composedly, and I left the room to give an account of what had passed to Miss Sherer and poor Eugénie, who now accused herself bitterly of having returned evil for good through her inconsiderate doings, and whom I had all the difficulty in the world to prevent from literally going "to throw herself at the feet of Mr. and Mrs. Wyndham."

Miss Sherer, who had no cause for self-reproach, did not express herself quite so vehemently, but the whole affair grieved her

deeply, and when she came to discover—as she did in a very few minutes, with no small surprise—*why* it was that I had thus chosen to disobey my mother, and mortally offend Mr. Wyndham, it was, I perceived, difficult for her to refrain from saying things of Godfrey that I could have very ill borne.

She did observe, that "though she could make allowance for irritated feelings, as well as for the heedlessness of a very young man, it was not right to bind the conscience of a young child by such a promise."

I listened in silence. I believe that, if Eugénie had not been by, I should then and there have poured out all that was burning within me—my shadowy impressions, my vivid remembrances, the hateful suspicion which growing experience was rapidly turning into a settled conviction—and I should have justified Godfrey by proclaiming my father's wrongs and my mother's disgrace! I did not speak, however, and, encouraged, I suppose, by

my thoughtful silence, Miss Sherer went on to point out gently, that the duty of showing respect and obedience to my mother was greater than any I could possibly owe to my brother, adding that, "even if I still felt bound by a promise I had been led into at an age when I could not possibly understand its importance, I was not necessarily obliged to break it because I went to Mrs. Stratton's party."

I said:—

"It was easier and better to avoid the possibility of an entanglement, into which every means would be used to draw me."

"What a pity then," said she, in a low voice, glancing at Eugénie, who was sobbing in a corner, "what a pity you were not allowed to go in ignorance!"

I could not yet see this, and at any rate the deed was done, and I was not going to retract what I had deliberately said to my stepfather, nor, indeed, did my governess urge my doing so.

The remaining days of Eugénie's stay in our house were doleful and unhappy in the extreme. I could not bear to see her out of favour with everyone but myself, nor could she bear to witness the state of sullen distance at which my mother and I, now more than ever, stood towards each other.

"C'est ma faute!" exclaimed she piteously; and when I made a last trial, at our parting, to convince her that she had less to do with the strife in our household than she supposed, she said "she was willing to hope so; but that it did not comfort her that we should be unhappy through our own faults even;" nor could she, whatever I might say, divest herself of her *idée fixe* of having injured my prospects "en faisant manquer mon mariage!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE tenor of the next three years of my existence may be best described by negatives. I did not marry, I did not fall in love, I did not go out into society; though my name had been duly placed beneath my mother's on her card, and I received a handsome quarterly allowance for dress and pocket-money. No further attempt had been made to "introduce" me to any brother, cousin, or nephew of Mr. Wyndham's. Whether his youngest brother had been cognizant of the plans laid for uniting us, was a point I had never been able

to determine; but one thing was certain—in our house he never appeared, and I neither saw him, nor heard any mention of his name.

I have sometimes suspected that Mrs. Stratton would, if my mother had had no objection, have "taken me out," as the phrase is; but if she ever did make such a proposal, it was declined without being referred to me. It followed, therefore, as my mother was, in her own opinion, no longer strong enough to accept the very few invitations sent her, that I had no choice but to stay at home, or take advantage of the hints I had once or twice received, that I could, if I pleased, go out with *Mr.* Wyndham! I preferred the former alternative.

Miss Sherer still lived with us, my only friend, my confidant in all things (save those which were entangled with the mysterious reminiscences of my childhood), and I was allowed to have what masters or mistresses I pleased, for languages, drawing, &c. I was

fond of such pursuits for their own sakes; and, calculating that my course of life would hardly furnish me much interest from without, either in youth or age, I considered that I could make no better use of some studious tastes I possessed, than so to cultivate them as to extract from them a source of mental employment of a deeper and more lasting description than that usually supplied by a superficial acquaintance with this or that foreign literature which happens to be the fashion.

So, as I had been taught something of Latin when a child (I believe mainly because the Halseys were given a smattering of it), I thought, when Eugénie left us, that I might as well open my Virgil and Cicero again, and have a quizzical old professor to help me to rub up again what I had lost in the two years during which I had laid them aside.

Then, in process of time, I set to work,

learning Greek of the same quizzical individual, purely for my own interest and the satisfaction of my own curiosity; for Miss Sherer had nothing to do with these studies of mine, further than just sitting in the room while I took my lessons, and now and then listening to a translation I manufactured more or less passably. In Italian and drawing we worked together; in the former I was the most successful of the two, in the latter she was decidedly my superior. It was wonderful, I thought for a time, how she, who had previously shown but a moderate interest in that pursuit, should have made so striking a progress in all its main points, should have been fired with so much love and zeal for the art, during the year and a-half of my absence from England. But the fact seemed less miraculous, when I learnt that she had, during that period, received almost daily lessons from a young artist of the name of Wroughton, who lodged next door to her parents, and to whom

she had subsequently (with their consent) engaged herself, though their union could not immediately take place, for reasons similar to those which delayed that of Eugénie Le Gallois with the unknown husband who was one day to be found for her. I could see that my governess firmly believed my progress would be very different, could it be carried on under the auspices of her intended; but she scrupled, from reasons of delicacy, to take any steps towards displacing the instructor I had been originally given; especially as Mr. Wroughton was now, happily for her and himself, in such growing repute as an artist, that nothing, short of princely remuneration, could have paid him for the time he would have sacrificed in giving me lessons.

Both my mother and her husband, besides, had a strong prejudice against young, or young*ish*, instructors (even when engaged to be married), so that the thing was considered as better not attempted; and, more-

over, as Miss Sherer now went every Saturday afternoon to her father's, to stay there till the Monday morning, and the betrothed pair had thus weekly opportunities of meeting, it was thought most expedient not to risk giving offence to the authorities in my home, by any visits being paid there; and, though I constantly heard of Mr. Wroughton, I never saw him nor expected to do so, till the, for me, evil day, should come, when he would claim his bride, and deprive me of my only friend! I say only, because, though I occasionally saw Eugénie when the family she lived with was in town, and, though the youngest of the Halseys—(her parents having returned to their London abode after a five years' absence)—had formed a certain degree of intimacy with me, I possessed no friend, in the full and real sense of the word, but my dear governess, who had taught, loved, and counselled me for so many years, who was young in heart and face,

though old in experience—such experience as most availed me—and who, as long as she remained in our house, stood between me and that dreadful sense of isolation which must weigh upon the sisterless girl who neither loves, nor is loved by, her mother.

To this solitude of the mind, as well as to the impending moral compulsion to live considerably more in presence of the parent, between whom and myself stood a partition wall in feeling—to this prospect of desolation, I looked forward with more and more of dismay, as I realized its nature, and as the time drew near when, shortly after my nineteenth birthday, we were to go out of town for the summer, and to bid farewell to Miss Sherer, for the last time by that name! She was to go to her parent's house for awhile, was to marry in the autumn, and expected to be established in the new home that was being prepared for her, by the time I returned to London.

I could not be so selfish as not to rejoice for her; but resigned to my own loss I was not, and I poured out my feelings on the subject, one morning in the course of a visit to Eugénie, who said, with tears in her eyes:—

"Ah, si j'avais eu l'esprit de me taire il y a trois ans, vous auriez épousé ce Mr. Wyndham, et comme cela vous n'éprouveriez que du plaisir, en voyant que cette bonne fille trouve un parti si sortable! Ah, que je regrette cela pour vous!"

"*I* don't, Eugénie," said I.

"Moi, si, que je le regrette plus que jamais," returned she, "maintenant que j'ai vû le jeune homme, qui va beaucoup chez une tante de ces demoiselles (meaning her pupils), et il est bien, très bien, je vous assure."

"Don't speak of him," cried I impatiently, and Eugénie good-naturedly changed the conversation, asking if I had been able to procure from the library some French book she

had recommended to me, a theme which lasted till I rose to depart.

It was the case, however, that my growing sense of all that threatened me on my separation from Miss Sherer, was gradually bringing me to look back with great vexation on the scenes and quarrels of three years past, and to wish—not that I married my step-father's brother—no!—but that I could have steered my course with sufficient temper to have escaped the decree which—circumstanced as I was—virtually condemned me to a single life. To such a life I felt I was doomed. I, who had not a relation I cared for in the world, save that distant brother, who had indeed written to me on the occasion of his son's birth, and again on his getting a ship, and setting sail as captain of the same into another hemisphere, but was now, I knew not where, and who might not, when he returned (if he *did* return) be able or willing to offer me a home to all whose inmates I should be wel-

come. I had read in the morning that passage of the Electra of Sophocles, where the heroine, after bewailing, with somewhat homely details, the lot to which she was reduced through the deeds of Ægisthus and her mother, laments, moreover, that she is condemned by them to be "unwedded, childless," and my refinement of the nineteenth century had been considerably jarred against, by the plain and unvarnished fashion in which the daughter of the "King of men" complained of her maiden estate; but I was growing sensible that my own feelings—now I looked in the face the spending of my whole life under my step-father's roof—were not so very unlike those of the Argive Princess. I would not, however, yield to them; saying to myself, "I should feel nothing of this, had I but the certainty—the hope even—of being one day loved and protected by that one kinsman, I have not now beheld these ten years! Shall I ever see Godfrey again?"

I took up my Sophocles on my return home, to read again the long lament of Electra; and then I turned to that other passage, where she calls on her long absent brother, to come, to help, to console—to avenge! I felt my blood burn, as I received into my soul that eager and passionate cry for redress of wrong endured, for justice on the inflictors of wrong; but what right had I to identify myself with the child of the murdered king? I shut the book in terror of the kind of inspirations it seemed to give me; it taught no Christian lore!—how should it?—and I flew to Miss Sherer, thanking God in my heart that she was still with us, to confess to her a part, at least, of the trouble of my mind, to implore from her some word of kind counsel, to the remembrance of which I could cling, staying my soul, as it were, on the staff of her affectionate advice. She spoke to me, as she had often done before, partly in sympathetic pity, partly in reproof; she besought me to rein in my

pride and anger, and bid me rather seek for help towards doing so, in prayer to God and in good works, than in those resources of human learning, to which I had recourse to distract my mind. My mother was, she said, not without affection for me, and would willingly put me in a situation which should afford me the opportunity of being offered another home, if I would but avoid giving Mr. Wyndham so many handles against me, by my unbending and harsh demeanour.

I said I would strive to soften it, because such was my duty, *not* with a view to being taken out into the world, which, indeed, independently of the offence I had given, I was growing more and more convinced it was not desired that I should ever be. But this opinion of mine, and its grounds, I did not like to express even to Miss Sherer, and the conversation ended, as those of the kind generally did, by caresses from her, and promises of amendment from me.

My mother's mind had been lately a good deal occupied by a question, which is, during the last month of the season, so perpetually in the mouths of the inhabitants of that great Babylon called London—namely, "Where shall we go this summer?" There were some objections to various of our usual places of resort, and of others my mother professed herself so tired that she could not encounter them again. I once suggested that we might stay where we were, thinking inwardly that if we did, I could continue the Spanish lessons I had lately begun taking, and might also keep Miss Sherer something longer, but this was a plan no one would entertain; and the subject was still daily canvassed, till it was set at rest by an offer of the Strattons.

They had just found themselves unexpectedly obliged to go abroad, and therefore proposed to Mr. Wyndham to let to him at a merely nominal rent, or rather to lend him, their abode in ——shire. In short, he was

offered the free use of the place, provided he did not object to the presence of sundry workmen, who were still busied with the completion of the vast hall they had been adding to their mansion; and provided, also, that my mother would not object to occasional visits from an artist, who had undertaken to ornament certain niches with the work of his pencil; and who, being also employed on a yet greater undertaking of a kindred nature at Lord Glenthurst's, some miles off, would be only now and then a guest at Bampton Chase. This was expected to be the great drawback; and I believe that these visits of an "artist," who was likely enough to be young, and might possibly be good-looking, would probably have put an end to the plan at once, had not the "artist" proved to be neither more nor less than Miss Sherer's future husband, Henry Wroughton! Mr. Wyndham might perhaps, a year or two back, have thought even him dangerous; but, now that his marriage-day

was all but fixed, I suppose that neither my step-father nor my mother considered him any longer so; and, in spite of his being still young, and described to us by his intended as uncommonly handsome, he was voted no impediment to our taking possession of Bampton Chase for the summer. I even hoped for a while that these engagements of Mr. Wroughton's might induce Miss Sherer to go with us, for a time at least, to the country, and so put off the hour of our parting. But her plans were fixed; she thought it a duty to her parents to spend with them the intervening period between our departure from town and her marriage; so that she firmly resisted the entreaties of our whole party, including those of Mr. Wyndham, who was ready to do anything to mark his respect for "that thoroughly good creature," as he had lately taken to denominate her. She was, however, extremely pleased to find that fate had contrived this means of making me acquainted with her

intended, and I readily agreed to show him my drawings, and claim his assistance in my sketches, besides promising to greet him with my school-room—and not my drawing-room—face; which two faces, as Miss Sherer always assured me, were as different as day from night.

I sincerely wished to make friends with Mr. Wroughton, and was, therefore, very glad, before we left town, to have laid a sort of foundation for our future conversations, by being taken to see his studio, which, notwithstanding his absence, opened at Miss Sherer's command. I there admired some things I had previously seen at exhibitions, and looked with even more interest on others, which, being still unfinished, were as yet unknown to the world; and I was sincerely grateful to my mother for permitting me to visit them. This morning at the studio was about the last thing connected with that time, of which I have a pleasant recollection; for the following

days were poisoned to me by that miserable foretaste of parting which lays hold of us as the sad moment draws nigh.

Of that parting I shall say nothing; it may seem unreasonable to call it a parting, when I knew that she would always love me, and that I should sometimes see her; but that was not like having her for myself and to myself in my home, and I wept over my loss, and over the desolate aspect the future presented to me, during a good half of our long journey from London.

CHAPTER X.

"Of stature fair, and slender frame,
But firmly knit, was Malcolm Graeme.
* * * * * * * *
His form accorded with a mind
Lively and ardent, frank and kind,
A blither heart, till Ellen came,
Did neither love nor sorrow tame;
It danced as lightsome in his breast
As played the feather on his crest."

SCOTT'S "LADY OF THE LAKE."

WE arrived at Bampton Chase at the moment when the woody country about the domain was in its greatest fulness of foliage and beauty; and after so many summers spent at

watering-places, to find myself once more in a country seat and park, which reminded me of dear old Blendon Hall, was a refreshment which acted as a set-off to the terrible constraint I at first experienced, in having so perpetually to make a third with my mother and Mr. Wyndham, without any kind Miss Sherer to break the monotony by her cheerfulness, and smooth over asperities through her constant kindness.

It was a great treat for me to ramble alone through the wild parts of the park, sometimes sketching, sometimes idling, sometimes picking orchises and centauries, but always dreaming of how delightful it would be to conjure Godfrey to my side, and make him tell me, under some wide-spreading oak or beech, every detail of the last ten years of his life. And then I would tell him *my* history; it was a blank indeed; but I could nevertheless wind it up by saying, "I have kept my promise, brother!—kept it in spite of reproofs and

punishments! Am I not your own sister?—and will you not take me away with you?"

My reveries were always stopped, however, by the remembrance that he could not take me with him till I was of age, and by the reflection, moreover, that his household might not prove one I should be happy in. (Katharine Halsey had told me a great deal of the annoyances of staying with married sisters!) Still, it was the refuge I longed to fly to, and I could not bear to think of it as otherwise than a peaceful one; so the reveries returned, and with them my mind was always busied as often as my feet trod the green turf of "the forest," as a certain part of Bampton Chase was called.

The days came and went; I got rather more used to the endurance of Mr. Wyndham's presence in the evenings than I could have expected; not that my aversion for him diminished, or that I ever ceased to regard him as the man whose deeds had rendered me father-

less, and deprived me of the fair inheritance of a mother's unsullied fame; but my feelings of boiling irritation grew less hot, especially after he had made acquaintance with two middle-aged sporting characters, who had taken a cottage near at hand with a view to fishing in certain celebrated trout and mill streams, and who were frequently asked by my step-father to dine and spend the evening with us, so as —with the help of my mother—to make up a rubber at whist. I did not know one card from another—had never chosen to learn—so I sat apart after tea, trying to make sense of some Spanish plays I had brought down with me from London; and I was thus engaged, when I was reminded one night, by something said at the card-table, that Mr. Wroughton's first appearance was to be looked for next day.

It instantly occurred to me, with some self-reproach for my idleness, that I had not finished one single sketch since I had come into the

country, though I had attempted several, and I immediately resolved, as Mr. Wroughton was not expected till dinner-time, to do what I could to make up for my lack of industry, by going off next day to a certain clearing in the so-called forest, and do my best towards finishing a sketch (the most promising, I thought, of my performances) which I had begun there one afternoon lately.

The following day was fine, and not too hot; so when luncheon was over, just as my mother was starting in the carriage with the library books to the nearest town, I took my way—slowly, and by the longest round I could—through the park, towards the wood which contained the above-mentioned clearing. The temperature was charming, a strong fresh breeze hindering the sun's rays from being oppressive; yet I was glad of the coolness afforded me by the dense shade of the closely entwined branches, in the still and lonely thicket I had to traverse before reaching the

object of my walk. The place reminded me of some of those scenes in the depths of real forests, which I remembered in some of the few pictures of Salvator Rosa's I had come across; and I would willingly have lingered among its brown shadows; but if I meant to do anything in the clearing, I knew I must not wait for the lights to be changed, from what they were when I began my sketch about the same hour of day. I hastened on, therefore, towards the opening in the woodland, but, on reaching it, was astonished to see my place there—as it were—taken by a man in a kind of grey shooting-dress, who, seated with his back towards me on the trunk of a felled tree, was busy taking the portrait of an uncommonly fine beech, which I had before admired, but looked on as beyond the powers of my brush. Who could this be? I wondered, but did not wonder long; for on the ground, behind him, lay a very neat case (that had evidently contained the artist's "stock in trade" of colours,

brushes, blocks, &c.), upon which I saw painted, in a size to ensure notice, the initials of our expected guest, Mr. Wroughton.

So there he was, come five hours before his time, purely, as it seemed, to hinder my getting ready anything fit to show him! This was my first reflection; my second was, that I ought to do my utmost to give a kindly welcome to one who was so dear to *my* dearest friend; and I was just determining to walk forward and introduce myself, when, at some slight noise, the artist turned his head and saw me. He was rising with some sort of apology, I thought, which I stopped by entreating him "to go on with his sketch without minding me;" and in order the better to put him at his ease, I placed myself, as I spoke, upon another felled tree, near to that which served him for a seat. He obeyed; and, as he was presently at work again, only raising his eyes now and then to contemplate the beech tree, I had leisure to observe, even while

I was painfully devising "what I should say next," that our visitor was so remarkably good-looking, and of so very youthful an appearance, that I no longer wondered at my humble-minded friend for having so often said "he was far too good-looking for her." I suppose this recollection did not inspire me much; for, though I thought it my duty to speak, I only contrived to bring out some civil regret at there having been no one in the house to greet him.

"Oh, I knew I was not expected so soon, and I shouldn't have been here till seven," replied he, diligently laying on his colours as he spoke; "but, as what I had looked to for filling up my morning failed me, I even came over on foot," (the distance between Lord Glenthurst's and Bampton Chase was, I knew, within the powers of a good walker) "so," continued he, "finding Mrs. Wyndham already gone on her drive, I took the short cut by the pheasant-covers, to my old friend there—the beech

tree, and here I am, making myself at home, in my own way. You have no objection, Miss Lee?"

These last words were said in such a lively, off-hand manner, and with so playful a look of mock deference, as he for a moment raised his bright blue eyes from his work, that I was not a little surprised at his demeanour, and felt myself colour and stammer, as I made some commonplace answer, disclaiming the jokingly supposed offence. I concluded that something stiff and embarrassed in my air struck him, for he asked, after a few seconds, whether he could possibly have been mistaken in the name by which he had addressed me?

"Oh, no, you are not mistaken at all," replied I. "You knew me, I suppose, by my likeness to my picture?" (I had about a year back given one, done of me by a German artist, to Miss Sherer.)

"Yes," said he, raising his eyes towards me again, "it was partly owing to that; but I

also knew that there was no other young lady, equipped as you are, likely to come across me for miles round. As to the likeness," proceeded he, while scrutinizing my face (not boldly, but rather with artistic examination), "it exists in a degree; but that picture does not do justice to your features, and still less to your countenance; your eyebrows are straighter and blacker, and your forehead is wider. I doubt if I should have made sure of '*your* being *you*,' on the sole authority of that severe-looking performance."

"Severe-looking!" cried I. "That does a little surprize me; for Miss Sherer and I both thought the man had been so clever in steering clear of that defect, though he took care not to over-soften my mouth and eyes; and I thought you had been so pleased with it as a painting!—at least Miss Sherer told me so."

There was a something in the artist's look which made me suspect that he had not, in

fact, been so much satisfied with the result of Herr Hartman's endeavour at a faithful portrayal of my physiognomy, as he had given Miss Sherer to understand. Perhaps he had not liked to appear over-critical upon a "brother brush," or perhaps—I had often heard artists accused of the sort of thing—perhaps he wished to flatter *me* by appearing dissatisfied with my picture. However that might be, I wished to change the subject, and was heartily glad to be able to tell him honestly "how delighted I had been, before leaving town, with all I had seen in his studio."

"In my studio!" exclaimed he, with a look of amazement.

"Yes, in your studio; you are astonished, I dare say, at Miss Sherer's having ventured to take me there even now, and I don't wonder, considering that you have, probably, in the last two or three years, heard enough and to spare about me and all that concerns me."

A sort of quiet smile just raised the corners of the young artist's mouth, as he replied, without lifting his head from over his drawing,—

"I certainly have heard of you often; but if by 'enough and to spare' you mean more than I wished to hear, you are mistaken; for I should like to know more about you; perhaps I shall now."

There was nothing of impudence, nothing of what is commonly understood by "assurance" in the man's way; but yet, considering the diffidence I had heard attributed to him, his manner was marvellously "assured;" and I again felt embarrassed in a manner I could not exactly account for, as, albeit little used to society, I was not constitutionally shy, and did not generally feel difficulty in entering into, or keeping up, conversation with persons from whom I did not anticipate superciliousness. I knew, however, that if I gave way to this feeling of

embarrassment, our acquaintance would make but slow progress; so I speedily began to obey the commands Miss Sherer had laid on me in London, by expressing to her intended my hope that he would, during the few days we were to enjoy his society, kindly afford me some assistance in an art in which I felt my woful shortcomings, but in which I was so desirous of improvement, that I was willing to buy it with any amount of labour. "For," concluded I, somewhat mournfully, "it is more than ever necessary for me to make myself employments and interests which shall not depend on any living being."

He looked inquiringly on me, and then said after a pause, "that I was most welcome to any artistic hints that might avail me from him; that he was sure I was a scholar who would do him credit, if he were permitted to impart to me what little knowledge his greater experience might be supposed to have supplied him with. But," he continued, with a certain

hesitation, "why should it be so necessary for you, Miss Lee, above all others, to create yourself such especially independent interests?"

"It is rather cruel of you, Mr. Wroughton," replied I, "to ask me that question, when you are going to make my best friend your wife, and, consequently, to deprive me of her daily and hourly presence; for you must be aware, having — as you confess — heard so much about me, that I am not situated like other girls, that I am completely isolated, having neither sister nor intimate companion, save the one who has already left my home, and is about to go to yours."

He made no attempt at apology, which I thought just as well, but presently observed that "the isolation I mentioned, though doubtless a misfortune, and partly caused by circumstances I could not control, need surely not be so complete as I assumed it must ever be."

"Why should you not," he proceeded, "at your age, and in your position, lessen the sense of it in a degree, by joining more in general company than—as I have understood, as I have been informed, indeed—you have hitherto chosen to do?"

"There was no choice in that matter," I replied.

"No choice!" said he, laying down his brush; "you don't mean that you would not be allowed, if you wished, to appear in the world, like other young ladies!"

"Not unless I had chosen to marry my step-father's brother," exclaimed I rapidly; but, as I uttered these words, I was so instantly struck by his look of scared amazement that feeling, or fearing, that my faith in Mr. Wroughton's knowledge of my private affairs had carried me too far, I coloured violently, and murmured, by way of excuse, that "I had supposed Miss Sherer had probably told him more than she had, in fact, thought worth

relating—and that I now saw she had kept to herself the history of a foolish family squabble, about my going or not going to a ball, rather more than three years ago."

"Was the ball at Mrs. Stratton's?" asked he, "because, if so, I believe I do know something about it, though I was stupid enough just now not to have it present to my mind. You would not go to it, I think?"

"No, I would not. I could not, after finding out, as I did, with what a definite and determined aim I was to be taken there."

"And Hugh Wyndham was the man you were particularly meant to make a conquest of?"

"Make a conquest of! I don't know if that was calculated on; I believe it was supposed he would like to marry me, for reasons quite independent of my being personally attractive or otherwise to him; but he was meant to make a conquest of *me*, and *that* I was resolved no Wyndham ever should! It was,

therefore, the shortest way, and the most dignified line to take, to stay at home, in spite of a great deal that was most unpleasant."

Again a sly and very slight smile played on the artist's lips.

I was afraid I had made myself somewhat ridiculous in his eyes, but he was grave and composed when he began again by saying :—

"I dare say you were right. Right as regards those you had to deal with at home, I feel sure you were; but, as regards Hugh Wyndham, whom I know something of (he draws rather in my style, as far as amateurs do draw), from what I have seen of *him*, I should say, that whatever else he might do, he he is not the kind of fellow that would have persecuted you from any other reason than that of falling over head and ears in love with you—which, to be sure, he might have done *then*—probably would; so it's lucky for him you were obstinate, and eschewed the ball, considering you hate everything that calls

itself Wyndham. He would not be so liable to that sort of accident *now*."

"Is he, then, engaged to anyone now?" I inquired.

"Yes, I believe so; in fact I know he is engaged,—feels himself so, at least,—to one of those Miss—what is the name?—but they are cousins to the young ladies with whom another acquaintance of yours—a French acquaintance —lives."

"Oh, then, I see now how it is Eugénie Le Gallois had met him," cried I.

"She mentioned Wyndham to you, did she?"

"Yes, and pronounced him to be 'bien, très bien,' which, to be sure, in poor dear Eugénie's lips, is cheap praise enough."

"Well, I like young ladies who are easily pleased; how are poor mortals to get on with those that are not? I hope *you* are, Miss Lee?" asked he with an arch glance, which somewhat confused me.

"I hardly know," replied I, "except by comparison; but I don't think that being a little more fastidious than Mademoiselle Le Gallois proves me guilty of all that is implied by that invidious word."

"It is apt to be the failing of those who live secluded lives," he remarked calmly; "not that I am assuming it to be yours; and, besides, since your seclusion is not voluntary, it would be unfair to—But to return to young Wyndham's engagement, what led me to mention it at all, was the consideration that if any of the various chances of life should ever throw you into his company, which—when you think whose brother he is—seems hardly improbable, it would be pleasanter for you to know with absolute certainty that, whatever others may conceive for him, he has himself—no aim, no view—that could cause you annoyance."

"Thank you," answered I; "it undoubtedly *is* as well I should be aware of it in case of

meeting him; not that he ever has called at his brother's house; I have often wondered why he did not. Do you suppose my mother and Mr. Wyndham know of his attachment to Miss Glynne?"

"I should not think they did; it's not a kind of affair likely to be patronized by relations who have had the advantage of "experience in life;" but I was not likely to be informed of the details of the business, and can tell you no more than I know myself."

A long silence ensued, during which he worked away vigorously at his bold and spirited sketch, while I watched his proceedings eagerly, trying if I could by possibility catch something, through my eye, of the manual dexterity and security of touch that I so much envied.

At last I made an attempt to renew the conversation by observing that "we had got a great way from the studio, and the pictures therein," and was beginning to ask my com-

panion some question about one of them, but he interrupted me, saying:—

"Oh, keep that, do, for dinner-time! You will want it then, I give you notice! And now, tell me, can you keep a secret for a foe, if the foe trusts you?—always supposing said foe to be one who fights fairly himself, and strikes no felon-stroke at you?"

I could not conceive what this had to do with me, or what possessed the man to talk such wild nonsense, and I suppose my face expressed my feelings.

"Ah, you don't understand yet," he went on, as he put the last touches to his beautiful sketch; "but the fact is, it is getting late; the rays of the sun slant very low, and people who mean to dress for dinner should pack up their traps; not that you have ever *un*packed yours," added he, glancing at my apparatus of colour-box, brushes, &c., half-buried in a sort of basket.

"Ah!" cried I, "it is your fault that they

have lain untouched! I meant—indeed I did—to have tried my hand at that bare stem with the ivy twining up it; but when I saw you here, and what you were doing, I could not venture to exhibit my awkwardness, before I had at least prepared you for its extent, and asked you for indulgence!"

"I can't think why you should be so shame-faced," returned he, while carefully packing up his implements in that same case marked "H. W." which had, an hour back, so speedily removed my doubts as to whom I had stumbled upon; "for," continued he, "as the nursery rhyme says, 'why should not one fool look at another?' I can't think why one poor blundering amateur should feel shy of a ditto, just because he or she has gone on bungling rather longer?"

"But you are no amateur, Mr. Wroughton," urged I.

"Wroughton is not—*he's* a capital artist; but the plain truth is, Miss Lee, you were

doomed, at any rate, to *dine* in company with your step-father's brother, and therefore it is as well he should have had this chance-given opportunity of letting you know there is no cause—beyond his unavoidable misfortune of being a Wyndham—for his presence being offensive to you."

He coloured highly as he spoke, his hands and eyes being still busied—perhaps rather ostentatiously—with something in his artist's scrip, that would not lie where it ought.

"You have played a very unfair trick upon me, Mr. Wyndham," exclaimed I, indignantly, "just in order to cheat me into saying things I should never else have uttered!"

"It would have been unfair—unfair and base, too," returned he gradually raising his eyes, "to have deliberately set about such a stratagem for such a purpose; but I give you my word of honour—supposing you to believe I may possibly know what that is—that I no

more thought of personating Wroughton, when I first addressed you, than I do now! Nor had I—when led on, by sheer fun and amusement, to take advantage of your mistake—the smallest notion of thereby extracting from you what would have been otherwise concealed! It simply entertained me to be chattered to so good-naturedly, by one whose face I had previously only known in that awfully classical representation of it with which Mademoiselle —I forget her name (at Lady Dashwood's)—fastens her gown at the throat! Was that so deadly a sin? And then," continued he, as I stood silently by without raising my eyes from the ground, "then, when I had got unawares into the Stratton ball region, could 'man of mortal mould' stand forth, and confess his identity with the unintending cause of so much strife and vexation, till he had, at least, been able to show that the supposed offender was innocent in will—innocent because ignorant—of the whole snare, which was spread in

vain for a certain very proud, and shy, and high-soaring bird?"

"You could have told me who you were at once," said I, bluntly.

"Yes, I could, and have been hated for my pains, which is what I don't want, and can't stand, after having been such good friends with you for an hour! More than that, I have told you my secrets!—put myself in your hands!—for I am ruined if the people here get scent, just now, of anything between me and Rosa Glynne! Don't be my enemy, because I have trusted you, as I have trusted no friend yet! Don't let us walk home to the house through this beautiful wood in such cat and dog style! It would be an affront both to art and nature! Now, that *is* being abominably proud and haughty," added he, as I stooped to repossess myself of my folded parasol, which had fallen down just as we were approaching the verge of "the forest."

He knelt down to pick it up, caught hold of

it before I could snatch it, and then, without rising from his lowly posture, said as he presented it to me, with a playful smile, yet in an earnest tone, that "I *must* forgive him, if I did not mean him to stay there for ever!" and that "it was hard such an innocent creature as he should be punished for other folks' sins!"

"It is not for other people's sins I have been angry with you," replied I, sulkily enough, "but I suppose there is no use making a fuss about what is, after all, nonsense; so pray stand up, Mr. Wyndham."

"Say first I am forgiven!"

"Oh, well, you are."

"And I accept the grace with all thankfulness," said he, rising, "and you won't betray me and my love?—for whose sake, be it observed, I offered myself on a visit here to Owen, because her home is not quite ten miles off. You will not betray us?"

"I don't know what you have seen in me,"

returned I, "to make you think I *could* take such mean revenge."

"I don't know why I asked you—more for fear you should not know the importance of secrecy, than anything else; for assuredly, you neither look nor speak as if there were anything of the traitor in you, though there's a great deal of the rebel! I shouldn't like—and yet I should like too—to have the keeping of you in order!".

"No one can do that *for* me, I fear," rejoined I, amused against my will, "now that poor dear Miss Sherer has left me to my own wise guidance."

"It's the best you can have; far the best, I believe, for the present, at least," observed my companion, in the tone of an experienced watcher of the world and its ways. "And now," added he, "that I am forgiven, and am promised friendship—alliance at least—and all that, do tell me, Miss Lee, what it was made you so absolutely certain that I was

your excellent governess's husband elect? At the first moment, I thought you just took me for 'my own self,' and then when I saw it wasn't *that*, I got into a dreadful puzzle, till at last, when you came to the studio, and called me Mr. Wroughton, something I had heard at the Dashwoods' about his being engaged to your duenna (isn't she rather old for him?) helped me out. And then, too, how comes it that she has never yet presented her adorer to you?"

I readily explained to him how all these things had come to pass (for I did not think it worth while to keep up dignified resentment with such a boyish rattle), and when I pointed to the "H. W." in the tidy contrivance he was carrying in his hand, as an answer in full to his first query, his laughter was all but "inextinguishable."

I had now questions to put in my turn, and soon learnt from my companion that Mr. Wyndham and my mother must have known

of his probable appearance at Bampton Chase, for some days past, keeping the fact from me, in fear (as I concluded) of my shutting myself up in my room, or doing something or other extravagant, unless I were, so to speak, forced into enduring his society for the first evening.

He had not, any more than Mr. Wroughton, been expected before dinner-time; and the meaning of his arriving so much earlier proved to be, that he had come down the night before to our post town, where he had slept, with a view to spending the forenoon with an old school-fellow, now a curate at that place. The curate, however, happening to be absent on a week's holiday, it followed that Hugh Wyndham could think of nothing better, by way of spinning out the time till dinner, than walking over to Bampton Chase, and going to sketch the beech-tree he had so often noticed when staying, as he frequently had done, with the Strattons.

"Now peace is made," observed my new

acquaintance, as we came in sight of the house, "I am not sorry we had the quarrel. There is nothing like this sort of stand-up fight, for both parties concerned to find out the metal each is made of! You are pretty stiff steel, to be sure!—though you *are* holding down your head to hide your laughing now. Never fear!—I know what you are, for all that! I am not joking, I assure you," he continued, "for, suppose we had not had our skirmish out there, just think how we should be both stiffening and setting ourselves up for a formal introduction with all its horrors, succeeded by that comfortable sensation of 'not getting on,' which would have most probably seized on us! Now, we are all right together, are we not?—I know *I* am!—I hope you are?"

He looked so confidingly good-natured as he held out his hand to me, while uttering the last words, that I could not do otherwise than give him mine, which he did not press, but shook, heartily and honestly. Our peace thus

sealed and ratified, he presently exclaimed, "Make haste, Miss Lee, we are just in time! There's Wroughton driving up in Lord Glenthurst's dog-cart, and Owen going out to meet him; for Heaven's sake, let me have the honour of introducing you to the guest, whom I know of old! But, if you talk half as confidentially to the real man, as you did to what you took for him, I warn you that the poor fellow will go off into convulsions!"

CHAPTER XI.

MR. HENRY WROUGHTON'S presence in the drawing-room, when we assembled there before dinner, was felt (by me, at least) as a Heaven-sent relief to the extreme awkwardness that must else have attended my finding myself, for the first time, in the same room with my mother, my step-father, and that other "H. W.", with whom I had so suddenly, and so strangely, concluded a "secret treaty of alliance."

My mother was necessarily taken up with

the duties of courtesy towards our artist-guest; and while she was so employed, and the Wyndham brothers were conversing together at a little distance, I had leisure to observe Miss Sherer's intended as it had been by no means in my power to do, at the moment of my hurried introduction in the entrance hall. He was about the middle height, with good features; but his countenance did not seem to me, on that first examination, an expressive one. His manner was grave and somewhat reserved; but, as it had no trace of awkward embarrassment, I do not know that I had any right to be disappointed in him, except that he had been described to me as tall, and eminently handsome. It must be owned, however, that few men would have appeared either of these things when standing within a pace or two of Hugh Wyndham, whose beauty of feature, grace of form, and liveliness of countenance were rare and striking in kind as well as in degree; for the

delicacy of his complexion, and easy lightness of his motions imparted to his whole frame an air of freshness and buoyancy, which, notwithstanding the manliness of his glance and the firmness of his tread, inclined most beholders to guess him younger by a year or two than he really was—namely, twenty-three. Wroughton, on the other hand, looked every day of *his* age, which was two or three and thirty; but I liked his face better and better as I watched him speaking: an employment which did not, however, so completely absorb me as to prevent my noticing (when the talk grew more general, and my mother and Mr. Wyndham perceived from it that Hugh Wyndham and I had already made acquaintance in the wood) that their surprize was mingled with a degree of satisfaction, which, though unspoken, yet betrayed itself to me; and I enjoyed a secret gratification in thinking how little pleased

they would have been, had they been able to form the slightest guess at the communications made on both sides during our *tête-à-tête*. Whether any similar feeling passed through Hugh Wyndham's mind, of course I could not know; but I thought that there was a mischievous sparkle in his eye, as he told our other guest, in every one else's hearing, "that I had been out that afternoon on purpose to get up a 'specimen sketch' for his (Mr. Wroughton's) inspection, but that somehow he was afraid he had interrupted my proceedings, and that, after all my industrious intentions, there was not much to show."

"Nothing at all to show," added I, addressing the artist; so I must even take courage, and, after exhibiting my old daubs, attempt something under your eye to-morrow, Mr. Wroughton."

"Yes," said Hugh Wyndham, before the painter could answer, "there will be some sense in that—very different from the kind of

instruction Miss Lee was thinking to content herself with!"

"What kind of instruction was Alswitha thinking of, Hugh?" asked my mother; but, before he could reply, dinner was announced, and he withdrew to make way for Wroughton to offer his arm to the lady of the house, while he himself did the same by me, reminding me, as we followed them into the dining-room, "not to forget the studio, and all my remarks on it, which I had been so near wasting in the afternoon."

I did not forget the studio, which availed me much in my endeavours to "get on" with Mr. Wroughton, by whom I sat; and, having thus made a beginning, I proceeded to dilate on the pleasure it would give Miss Sherer to know I should at last have the two or three lessons I looked forward to from him. His manner of answering showed that he was gratified by my wish, and most ready to comply with it; but, either from diffidence or

absence, he was not, that day, quick at drawing one subject of talk out of another, and I still had to start theme after theme, without much success in lighting on any he could take up with apparent interest.

While I was thus labouring to do my duty, I tried not to look at my opposite neighbour, who, I soon perceived, was watching me with so amused a look (though talking all the while to his host and hostess) that I dreaded meeting his eyes, for fear of catching the infection and laughing. He, I knew, was laughing a little at me, as well as at his artist friend; but he looked so perfectly good-natured, so boyishly gay and merry, that it was impossible to be annoyed at the fact of contributing, in my degree, to the mirth that was so frankly enjoyed; especially as, by the time dinner was half over, he very kindly set to work talking across the table to my neighbour—to reward *me*, as he afterwards said, for my virtuous exertions—and thus relieved me of the heaviest

part of the task I had undertaken, that, namely, of finding a succession of topics, suitable to be discussed with a man who had, at the moment, no real pleasure in talking about anything but what was connected with his art, or with his betrothed. With regard to his worthiness of this last, supposing I had ever doubted it, I should have been now satisfied by seeing how warmly he valued her every quality, and how eagerly he looked forward to the time when he was actually to expect her in his home. I could understand, too, on perceiving how his whole face lighted up when he spoke of her, that if her presence had the same effect on his countenance, she might easily be led, without any extraordinary delusion of love, into supposing him "very handsome." Yet there occurred such occasional pauses in our conversation, as caused me to be glad to find that Hugh Wyndham had once met him on a sketching tour in Wales, where they had lodged in the

same cottage for a week, so that they had sketching and travelling reminiscences in common, which were a great assistance after the actual talking of pictures, &c., was over; and I could rest, and allow myself to be quietly amused, during my last half hour in the dining-room. But when that had elapsed, it was with no small trepidation that I followed my mother into the drawing-room; for great was my alarm lest she should take the opportunity of inquiring into the particulars of my meeting with her young brother-in-law. She, however, only gave me, in a dry cold manner, the information I had already received from Hugh Wyndham, concerning his having offered himself on a visit, adding, that "after the manner in which I had once thought fit to demean myself, she and Mr. Wyndham had considered that my being taken by surprise afforded the best chance of my behaving with decent civility."

I was too glad of escaping investigations

much to heed the style of her address to me; yet I rejoiced that we were very soon followed by my step-father and his guests, who, the moment they had swallowed a cup of tea, were, as a matter of course, doomed to seat themselves with him and my mother at the card-table.

Hugh Wyndham cast a look of unfeigned despair at me, though he gave no farther token of rebellion, till, just as they were settling who were to be partners, Major Herries, one of my step-father's sporting acquaintances from the neighbouring cottage, came in, full of apologies for calling so late, and was instantly hailed as a substitute by the unwilling recruit, who escaped at once from the compulsory service, and, hastening to a seat by the sofa, on which I had settled myself for the evening with my Spanish books, exclaimed,—

"Safe at last! I never thought to be glad to see that black-leg of a fellow!—but I should be thankful to Old Nick for calling, if he would

only take my hand at whist; and no better purgatory could ever be devised for my sins, than a century or so to be passed as that quartette is now passing its precious time! Poor Wroughton thought to get off, I suspect; but I really could not be so generous the first night! He shall have his respite in turn to-morrow. Don't let me disturb you. I see you have two thick books by you, and one's a dictionary, I instinctively feel, but you don't grudge me a refuge in this corner?"

I replied that I believed all the chairs in the room were common property, but begged to know what pursuers he could be flying from, since he thought a "refuge" so needful?"

"Oh, from no particular wild huntsman; but a natural impulse always drives me to hide myself, and have my existence forgotten, when a rubber is going on."

"Don't you think," said I, "that, as far as regards the players, you are pretty sure of

that, — at least, so long as their game continues?"

"While it continues, of course, they would take no notice if a lion walked in, or a Cupid flew down the chimney!—not they! But my dread always is, lest in some horrid pause—some perilous interval—one of the party who is not getting on well, should call out 'I have no luck to-night! Do take my hand,—there's a good fellow!'—which just inclines me to answer that I am a very bad fellow, and don't mean to stir." "Now, suppose your mother were to get tired of what she is about (which would be no wonder), and asked me to replace her at that green table, you know I couldn't refuse! — and that is why I want to seem so busy talking or studying here, that no one can be so inconsiderate as to disturb me. So, pray give me that thick volume, that I may see if it's the same I used to try and pick Spanish out of at Gibraltar last year!"

I handed him the dictionary, of which he testified his approbation with a patronizing nod, and then, laying it open before him, on the arm of the sofa between us, he proceeded—after making the remark that "a Spanish examination would keep"—to observe that "the extreme gravity—not to say severity—of my aspect during dinner, while labouring to entertain his friend Wroughton, had been very near moving him (Hugh Wyndham) to a most unseasonable fit of laughter; for," said he, "after having got acquainted with your face as it really is, there was something so odd and droll in seeing it stiffen into just the look it has in your French friend's brooch, that I thought at one moment I must have fled the country! You are not angry with me for my confession?"

"Angry?—No!—I can just fancy how I looked," said I; "but I did not know the miniature I gave Eugénie was so grim an affair as you seem to think it, though I

certainly believe the one Miss Sherer has, is more like."

"Is it your way," inquired he, after a pause, "to give your picture to all your friends?"

"I *have* only Miss Sherer and Mademoiselle Le Gallois," replied I, "for I can hardly call Katharine Halsey a friend of mine, though she is my cousin; I have seen too little of her till just lately."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have actually no friends but those two governesses?" asked he, with blunt surprise.

I assured him that such was the simple fact.

"Then it's not so wonderful you should be so wrapped up in the lady for whose admirer you did me the honour of taking me," he continued, evidently impressed with the notion that Miss Sherer, because she had been my governess, must be necessarily a wizzened old maid, instead of being, as I laboured to explain

to him, a very pleasing-looking, fresh-complexioned, easy-mannered little woman, of eight-and-twenty.

"So much the better for Wroughton," said he, "if she's half such a neat-built fairy as I see you think her; but it really *is* very odd that you have no friends in the usual sense! All the other girls I know, pass half their lives in corresponding with—or working presents for—their half-dozen of favourites each!"

I looked down, thinking within myself what correct notions he was likely to form of me and my habits, if he judged me by analogies taken from the ways and pursuits of others of my age and position, and I suppose something in my countenance partially conveyed these thoughts to him, for he said,—

"You smile at the idea of being compared to other girls! But it is difficult at once to realize the extreme difference situations make; though I understand yours in a degree, considering that—as I might have guessed before

—*they*" (he looked towards the card-table) "are not, and never have been, overwhelmed with society."

I saw he did not in the least comprehend how matters had really stood with me, but assumed (to a greater extent than was precisely the case) that my mother was not received in the world; I made no attempt, however, to enlighten him, and he soon went on to observe that, "as I was in such a 'friendless' predicament, perhaps he had the better chance of being put up with as a temporary friend—conditionally on good behaviour, of course—till I found myself something wherewith to replace the treasure Wroughton was snatching from me."

"It's an honest way of advertising for a place, at least," said I, laughing, "and I don't see why I should not take you at your word, on your own conditions, as a 'temporary friend!' which means, I suppose, for as long as we are here at Bampton Chase?"

"Hush! hush!" whispered he, though I had not said a word of that to which his thoughts flew instantly. "Don't investigate 'whys' and 'wherefores' here; (out in the wood, I'll explain as much as you please!) but, seriously, a page who comes upon trial is kept, 'if he behaves himself,' and a 'temporary friend,' if found true and steady, may turn out a life-long one."

"*If* true and steady, there is no reason against it," returned I, gaily, for I was not only amused by the lively flow of his talk, but I was also determined not to show any primness, that might be understood as petty malice for his having given occasion to my extreme seclusion.

"Well, I mean to be all I ought to be," continued he, "and I have high views, I assure you, Miss Lee, of the duties of friendship; you will have to confess that, though I *am* a Wyndham!"

As he spoke, he looked at me with such a

frank and beaming smile, such an expression of joyous kindliness in his clear blue eyes, that I involuntarily exclaimed,—

"Oh, you are *so* different to the only Wyndham I have known!"

"Well, I hope I am, in some points," replied he, with a hasty glance towards his brother; "for, besides his being so fond of those abominable cards and betting-books, I can't help thinking that Owen has now-a-days a sort of 'down look' I should be sorry to catch from him; but," proceeded he, after a moment's pause, "do you know he wasn't always so?—for, independently of the crows' feet, &c., that time brings, I can remember him very different, and my mother often says that I am the image of what he was some fifteen years ago, which was, of course, before you can recollect him."

An indescribable shudder came over me; for I *did* recollect that, just fifteen years back, the Owen Wyndham who often played with

me at Blendon Hall, before Godfrey's banishment, had none of that "down look" now justly ascribed to him by his brother, was fair and fresh and lively, and had a light, off-hand manner, which, I could perfectly conceive, might altogether have rendered him far from unlike the young man now seated by my side. The features of the two brothers were in truth so similar, that I ended by wondering it had not struck me at first; but *that* was long afterwards; for I could not perceive the resemblance then, and I said so to Hugh Wyndham, who made no immediate reply, taking up one of my Spanish books, and turning over its leaves in an idling way, while I, recurring to my interrupted occupation, tried to recollect what word I had been seeking for, and began diligently looking at the first page of the dictionary, in hopes of its being perhaps suggested to me by one of those which formed the long double column I was examining.

"You don't see the likeness?" resumed he

at last, laying down the volume, "do you see more between me and my brother Edward?—the one who is in India now?"

"I think I remember hearing that Mr. Edward Wyndham had called two or three years ago," said I, "but I don't recollect whether—no—I recollect perfectly, that I did *not* see him. I know none of your eldest brother's relations, except Mrs. Stratton and yourself."

"Ah—yes—true, I forgot," answered he hastily, as if conscious of a blunder; and I resolved instantly to try and satisfy myself concerning a point I had been near inquiring about in the forest, but had been diverted from doing so at the time.

"I once heard something," began I, feeling myself colour all over, but proceeding, nevertheless, "I once heard something, which, as I understood it, implied that you were unable, for some unexplained cause, to visit your

brother in his house, though you met him elsewhere: was that true or not?"

I looked full at him, and saw the rising blood crimson his whole face, even more deeply than when he confessed in the wood to the part he had been playing.

"It is true," replied he, in so low a tone I could only just hear it, though he sat close to me; "but that, again, is an affair the 'whys' and 'wherefores' of which I can't go into here in the very room with *them;* one can't be as confidential within stone walls as 'under the greenwood tree.' When you and I next sit beneath one, I promise to satisfy your inquiring mind, as far as my knowledge and capacity enable me."

I did not insist, feeling rather ashamed of having pushed any stranger so home, and Hugh Wyndham now went back to the subject of Wroughton, and the drawing-lesson I expected to have from him in the park next day.

"I hope I shall be allowed to come in for some of the benefit of his teaching," said he; "for, as I don't want to ask Herries and his companion's leave to fish in their stream down yonder, I shouldn't well know what to do with myself in the next four-and-twenty hours, unless I took part in your drawing schemes—subject, of course, to the rule and directions of the real artist we shall have the advantage of."

I wondered, secretly, how long my present companion contemplated honouring Bampton Chase with his presence; and I thought I perceived, by the way in which he now proceeded to chalk out plans for his own occupation and amusement, that he looked forward to spending best part of the summer with us.

"You ride, Miss Lee?" he assumed, rather than asked.

"It is many years since I have done so," replied I.

"*Many years!*" he exclaimed. "You talk as if you were half a hundred years old already!"

"They seem to me a great many," replied I. "This time six years, at Tunbridge Wells, was when I last rode."

I suppose the recollection that poor little Emmeline had shared a few of those last rides with me, rendered my voice and look mournful, for Hugh Wyndham said, in a tone of sympathy:—

"You really have been mewed up in the dullest fashion I ever heard of! but you must have some rides now; I mean to speak to Owen about it to-morrow."

"For Heaven's sake don't!" cried I, now seriously alarmed; "it is not his fault I have no horse—I was offered one long ago—it's my own doing that I take no rides! I entreat of you not to say a word on the subject!"

"I won't if it annoys you; but what *do* you like, then, if you will neither dance in

town, nor ride in the country? You can't be always reading, or drawing either! Is there nothing besides you are fond of?"

"I am very fond," said I, "of wandering by myself about this park, or any other lonely place, in fine weather, sitting down when I like, and thinking of what I please, without having to mind anything but my own fancy."

"It's always pleasant to give oneself up to that," observed he, "and I know some girls who—but I should not have thought you were one of them—for it must require one to be—"

He hesitated, as if not sure if he ought to express what was in his head, and I asked "if what 'it required' was to be far cleverer than the like of me?"

"Oh, no!—not that at all."

"Then, do you mean that you *had* hoped I had more sense than to like such foolish idling?"

"What I was thinking of, had nothing to do with sense or folly—and perhaps I am quite mistaken—I should think I was, as regards you."

"At all events you are growing too oracular for me to follow you," cried I.

"Then I suppose I am horridly stupid," he rejoined. "I always get so when I try to go deep," added he, smiling at his own confusion of thought and speech; "so it's lucky for you," he continued, "that the rubber is actually over; and here comes our friend! Wroughton," cried he, "were you ever told that you were like me?"

The artist stared; I cast a beseeching look at Hugh Wyndham to restrain him, if possible, from making known the whole absurd particulars of my mistake that afternoon; and he heeded me sufficiently to abstain from going quite that length, contenting himself with telling the painter that a friend of his—a lady—had described him to Miss Lee

in a manner that would have so exactly suited himself (Wyndham) that she almost doubted of their respective identities.

Mr. Wroughton coloured, stammered something about the "highly flattering description *that* must have been," and looked altogether so confused and uncomfortable, that I was obliged to take him in hand myself, and to show him, by my observations and inquiries about his new house, &c., that I was thoroughly *au fait* of all the little particulars most likely to interest him at the time; in doing which, I succeeded so well, that I believe he was growing quite happy in my company, when Major Herries took his leave, and we all parted for the night.

When, on finding myself alone, I looked back on the events of the now closing day, I could hardly give credit to my own knowledge of what had passed, so far as to avow to my own mind that I had, within the last few hours, entered not only into an acquaintance,

but an intimacy—a treaty of alliance and temporary friendship—with my step-father's brother! Hugh Wyndham had told me his secrets, and I had, to say the least, talked to him with a degree of confidence, such as I had never shown before to any creature save Miss Sherer and Eugénie!

If such circumstances had been prophesied but the day before, I should have scouted the bare idea of their possibility! And yet they had actually befallen; and I sat there, after this exchange of confidential talk between myself and the man to shun whom I had braved so much, to think him over, to consider whether he could possibly *be* the frank-hearted youth he had seemed to me while conversing with him, or whether he were neither more nor less than a duplicate of his brother Owen, gifted, even as he had been, with a personal grace and apparent frankness, to which he was indebted for most valuable assistance in compassing whatever purpose of interest or pleasure might

be uppermost with him at the moment. For an end of his own, he had—avowedly to me—come down to his brother's house; for an end of his own, he wished to be friends with me. Was the plain-spokenness with which he confessed his motives and objects, the true open dealing of a noble and guileless mind, or the super-subtle contrivance of a calculating one? Was the merry good-nature with which he had alternately joked and sympathized with me, the effect of a really amiable as well as honestly cheerful disposition, or a token of that mere pliancy which often accompanies utter want of feeling, and serves the vanity of its possessor by making it easy for him to become all things to all men?

I should not, for a moment, have dreamt of attributing such contemptible qualities to one so pleasing, had he borne any other name save Wyndham, had he appeared in my home through any other claim than that of being my step-father's brother; and of this I was so

sensible, that I presently reproved myself for yielding to such a prejudiced view as that of assuming Hugh Wyndham's disposition to be false and selfish, because Owen Wyndham's was both in the extreme.

A more charitable impression could do *me* no harm, whatever it might, were I in the position of Miss Rosa Glynne; if he continued half as good-natured and agreeable in his demeanour, he would be an immense acquisition to our dreary home circle, as long as he chose to stay; and, though he was quite the reverse of the kind of man I had sometimes pictured to myself, as what I could look up to, and be interested in, I was by no means above feeling pleased with one who seemed so pleased with me, so willing to take me "just as I was" for a companion—a friend. I inferred therefore that he was not remarkably discriminating, and supposed I was probably destined to hear a great deal from him, about a very commonplace girl, since to that class

I had long ago concluded, for reasons it would be difficult to define, that each and every one of those pretty Glynnes belonged. Still I thought he showed a kind of instinct I liked, in trusting me with his private affairs, and I inwardly resolved not only to justify that trust by discretion, but to reward it, if I could, by whatever assistance it might prove in my power to afford. I owed him something at any rate for the amusement of that evening, which was about the liveliest I had as yet experienced in the somewhat clouded springtide of my life.

CHAPTER XII.

We had not supposed we should see much of Mr. Wroughton next morning, as he had expected to be hard at work in the Hall for several hours; but when we all met at breakfast, it appeared that the niche he was to have been busied with, had not proved, on examination, to be in a fit state for him to begin his operations. He therefore declared himself to be at my service; and, as he, like Hugh Wyndham, was well acquainted with the place and all its varied beauties, they soon settled between them in what direction we

should wander in search of the picturesque. It was agreed that it would be disagreeable to be hampered by any necessity of returning by luncheon-time, and that the case marked H. W. should be made to contain a packet of sandwiches, &c; so, while Hugh Wyndham was carefully contriving how these should be so disposed as neither to injure nor be injured by its other contents, I showed my performances, such as they were, to Mr. Wroughton.

He criticised them intelligently, yet kindly, giving me encouragement without flattery, and showing in all he said and did, a good sense and a clear judgment, which made me feel I could depend on him, and made me hope, moreover, that Miss Sherer might have been right in believing that skilful teaching would do a great deal for me.

The business of looking through my portfolio over, we set off, an extremely happy trio; Wroughton being by this time quite as much at home with me, as with his other companion—

Hugh Wyndham, in the same boyish spirits, which I afterwards knew were always natural to him, when not reined in by some pressure from without, and I myself enjoying, for the first time, the delight of going to spend some hours freely in an employment I liked, and in pleasant company.

Mr. Wroughton made himself extremely agreeable, telling us anecdotes of his travels, and passages in the lives of various celebrated artists, English and foreign, with whom he was acquainted, in a manner which entertained me as much as it interested me, and made me feel more and more confident of his being a person whose friendship I should be glad to possess.

The day was not quite so good for sketching as the preceding one, there being occasional intervals of cloudy gloom between the spaces of sunshine; but Hugh Wyndham seemed pleased and entertained with anything and everything; and, though I set out with some-

what despising his mood as childish, I was obliged to confess, as the day wore on, that his was not merely a very happy disposition, but a most agreeable one for his companions, inasmuch as he was not only inclined to find all around him pleasant, but to make it all pleasant to others by his obligingness and unselfishness, in every little matter that admitted of a choice of conveniences and advantages. This was to be seen when we were first placing ourselves, then when we changed afterwards (once to please me, and once for Wroughton's sake), and then again when we, later in the day, set our provisions in a different spot to that which he (Hugh Wyndham) had sought out and proposed; in short, through every detail of a long day, spent in doing things which some active and lively people only enjoy when giving them an opportunity of showing what good arrangements they can make.

After luncheon, before I had resumed my

drawing, but when Wroughton was already industriously at work again a few yards from me, I observed to Hugh Wyndham that "I supposed he was now going to leave us, to take his ride?"

"Leave you, to take a ride all by myself! Why on earth should I?" inquired he.

"I thought you had your reasons," returned I; "and one *may* allude to them 'under the greenwood tree,' you say."

"Oh, I see—it's a ride to Hincksley you are thinking of; but, besides that, it's perhaps not quite politic to begin going off on long, unaccounted-for rides the very day after coming down, a little bird told me that the Glynnes go to-day to a flower-show at Woodburn, which is something beyond where my chestnut could well carry me at a stretch; and Rosa is always expected to go with the rest on those sort of parties—no chance of her being left alone!—though she is as fond of wandering about a park, thinking of far-off friends, as—you are."

I privately thought Rosa Glynne's reveries were likely to be of a very different nature from mine (it was plain her lover looked on the turn for solitary wanderings as necessarily indicating a sentimental preoccupation); but I made no remark to that effect, not considering it incumbent on me to protest against what he seemed to assume as matter of course. I soon took up my drawing again, and so did he; and, as he did not speak for some time, I concluded that his attention was too entirely devoted either to the gnarled oak he was busied in putting on paper, or to thoughts of his beloved Rosa, for him to have leisure to recollect the promise he had made, the evening before, to answer certain questions of mine, next time he and I were "alone in the green-wood." Now, though we could not be precisely called "alone" at this moment, we were virtually so, for, if we did but lower our voices a little, Mr. Wroughton might be considered out of hearing; but I did

not like to disturb his meditations, if they happened to be pleasant, by broaching a subject which, I suspected, was painful to him; and, besides, he *had* satisfied me as to the main thing, namely, that he had not been always free to enter his brother's house.

This was one token, among many, that Owen Wyndham was looked on by his family as a man to be shunned, if not absolutely disowned; and I knew enough of the world to be aware that this was a degree of reprobation considerably beyond what a man usually incurs from his kindred, for even the more serious forms of what are called "sins of youth," especially when the sinner in question is so situated that his relations are under no fear of having to pay for his sins out of their own purses—an inconvenience the Wyndhams could never have dreaded, since my stepfather's marriage. Was he, then, known for some more shameless profligacy, some more flagrant breach of trust, than the indulgence

of Society can extend to? Or, was it that the other Wyndhams, from any possible contact with whom I had ever shrunk, as from contamination, were, in fact, supporters of a higher standard of right and honour than the society around them? It might be that; and if so, though I should never regret my promise to my brother, still it was a foolish prejudice to suppose nothing good could spring from among them, and there was no reason why Hugh should not be as truthful and high-minded as he was evidently good-humoured and kind-hearted. I suppose that, while I thus worked out my calculations upon what was and might be, something of the severity of my mental employment affected my features, for my younger companion suddenly exclaimed,—

"Do you always look so when you are drawing? I declare, if I had my figure-book here, I would have you down as one of the Fates, distaff in hand, instead of pencil!"

"And a much more useful thing too, people

would say!" replied I, looking up, amused at his threat, whereupon he exclaimed in a disappointed tone, as he flung away a fresh bit of paper he had just snatched up,—

"Oh, no! You won't do now! It's quite another face."

"If you really think me a good model for Clotho spinning, I dare say I could get back the face," returned I.

But it would not do; the corners of my mouth rose involuntarily, for something in Hugh Wyndham's matter-of-fact earnestness entertained me inexpressibly, and he shook his head hopelessly as he observed that "*it* was gone; there was no help for it."

Mr. Wroughton now begged to know what was the loss which was being deplored, and on its being explained to him, remarked "that the only way to recover the vanished look would be, by some means, to re-awaken the train of thought of which it had been the outward indication."

"What *were* you thinking of?" asked Hugh Wyndham.

"Of many things," answered I, somewhat taken by surprise at the question, which was absolutely unanswerable; "many and various things, partly of my brother, and of matters connected with him."

"Is that the Captain Lee of the *Manilla?*" asked Wyndham, "who married one of the Murrays of Heatherbank?"

"Yes," replied I; "do you know him?"

"Not exactly, but I have seen him many times, and met him occasionally—was in his company just before he last sailed, when I was in Edinburgh."

"It is ten years since *I* saw him," observed I, sighing.

"Then you would probably not know him now, for I thought him a good deal changed even from what I remembered him at Malta, four years back."

"Was he looking ill in Edinburgh?" inquired I.

"Oh, no—far from it! He is reckoned a fine man; not at all the sailor cut; you somehow don't often see so tall a fellow in that service."

"Can you describe him at all to me?" urged I eagerly.

He was silent for some moments, and then said, in a more measured tone than was habitual to him,—

"I can fancy his having been, once upon a time, something like you,—you with your Clotho face on."

"He had not that kind of face of old—except—"

"Ah," interrupted he, "the exception has generally been the other way when *I* have seen him; though I don't mean that he either looks, or bears the name of, an ill-tempered man; only there is that appearance of 'sitting in judgment' that you had just now, which I

dare say goes off when you know him; but as he and I never spoke, I can't tell if *his* countenance can light up. To be sure, I believe he had enough to drive him next door to mad, last winter four years in the Mediterranean; at least, they said he had been over head and years in love with that niece of old Stanhope's (who was his captain then);—what *was* her name? But she was a proper one for playing fast and loose, I heard!"

"Was not Miss Murray, who is now his wife, Captain Stanhope's niece?" asked I. "He wrote to me that year, saying his captain's brother-in-law was spending the winter in Naples with his family."

"So he was, but those were not the Murrays; and it was not one of Stanhope's nieces your brother married. I recollect the name now! it was Annesley! Lilian Annesley was the girl he was so distracted about, and who jilted him to marry Lord Southborough. How it all was I don't know; can't enlighten you as

to the story; I can only tell you that we heard one day at Malta that Lilian Annesley was married, and, a fortnight after that, Lee was engaged to one of the Murrays."

So Godfrey had not married a woman to whom he had long been attached, as I had fancied! I proceeded to inquire of Hugh Wyndham if he knew, or had ever seen, my sister-in-law. Yes, he had seen her and her sisters; but, not knowing them apart by their Christian names, could not be sure which was now Mrs. Lee. They were all three pretty-looking, girls, not what you would call striking, but lady-like and good-natured; going out very little when at Malta—it was thought their father was a good deal embarrassed, though he had a fair property in Scotland.

Well, Godfrey had not married for money, it was plain; but I now recollected various expressions in the letter announcing his marriage with Miss Murray, which agreed, or might agree, with the supposition of that, to

me, most incomprehensible of things—a marriage from pique.

I would not ask any further questions of my new companion, partly because he professedly knew nothing but by hearsay of my brother's affairs, and partly, because I suspected that Godfrey's appearance and demeanour had not produced a pleasing effect on him. I therefore continued my drawing in silence, wondering internally whether the household into which I had so often wished to be transplanted were a happy and a cheerful one, and longing eagerly, as vainly, to learn what had been the events of that year, which had been alluded to by him as having been one of "unspeakably cross occurrences and worry of mind indescribable." When I had made as fair a sketch of the object selected for me as was in my power, I took it to Mr. Wroughton, and, while receiving his criticism, I noticed that Hugh Wyndham was examining, with great attention, some drawings he had

picked up from among various scraps lying about near at hand; and before I had quite heard my instructor's last words upon my defective mode of arranging my foregrounds, he exclaimed, "Why, this is capital, Wroughton!" handing to me, as he spoke, a sketch half-tinted in sepia, representing a young woman of sad and severe aspect, diligently employed with a spindle and distaff. I saw it was meant for myself, and, from the way in which Hugh Wyndham went on praising the exactness of the portraiture, as well as the nature and spirit of the sketch, I concluded it was like me.

"To be sure," said he to Wroughton, "you, who make figures your business, are very different from a bungler like me; still—how *did* you manage to catch that identical look that came and passed away? What a memory you must have!"

"Not much of that," said the painter, quietly, as he re-examined my landscape

sketch; "but, a minute or so after you had lamented the loss of that peculiar look of Miss Lee's, I happened to turn my head, and saw her face reassume gradually, as she conversed with you (about Captain Lee, I think), just that expression which, I concluded, had struck you previously, and which I thought might suit, if not for such an awful being as one who was supposed to spin our life-threads, yet for some captive princess of old times, toiling in sorrow and slavery. You neither of you saw what I was about, as you both were looking down at your own drawings while you talked; and I had but to copy the face, changing the attitude a little on account of the difference of occupation. I hope Miss Lee does not object to the liberty I took?"

"I!—far from it!" was my answer. "I can't, indeed, judge of the resemblance, not having seen myself *so* in the glass; but I can only feel flattered at being thought worthy to serve as a model for what you, Mr.

Wroughton, meant to represent. This is not the Fate Clotho," added I, holding it towards Hugh Wyndham; "*she* should look impenetrable. I can much better fancy it the picture of Electra, spinning alone before the return of Orestes."

"It's an admirable thing—and a startling likeness of you—as you *can* be," observed Wyndham. "Whether it ought to be called Clotho or Electra, I don't know, and it doesn't signify—one was a Fate, and the other little better than a Fury—if I recollect right; so it's all the same; give it the name you please!"

Mr. Wroughton was much gratified by the acknowledged success of his sketch, which he presented to me with a kind of formal politeness, only requesting permission to take a copy of it for his own portfolio, and "for *my* friend," meaning Miss Sherer, before leaving Bampton Chase.

It was now full time to turn our steps homewards, and I began getting together my

drawing apparatus, while Hugh Wyndham, still occupied with "Wroughton's wonderful knack at dashing off a likeness," stood looking alternately at the spinning damsel and at me, as if trying, but trying in vain, to detect some error in it as a portrait.

"It is perfectly correct, though so small," said he; and then turning to me he added, "Now I look at you close, you *are* more like your brother than I thought, except that his eyes are hazel, instead of grey, as yours are, and they are deeper set, too. I wonder what your mother will think of this likeness.

"Oh, she wouldn't like it at all!" cried I. "Pray don't show it her!"

"Well, I won't if it annoys you," said he, as I put it carefully away within my drawing-book, "though, if she didn't object to that miniature, I'm sure I don't know why she should find fault with this of Wroughton's, which at least does you justice in *one* phase of your face. But you know best, I suppose."

We then began in earnest to move towards home, had a charming walk through the park, and talked all dinner-time of the enjoyment we had had in the forest, apparently as much to the satisfaction of my mother and my step-father as our own.

It drizzled in the evening, so that neither Major Herries nor Mr. Garth thought it worth while to come through the rain; and it therefore followed that the whist party had to be made up out of the company present, I entertaining myself with my books, as usual, and quite satisfied to do so.

I think my mother made a faint attempt, either for her own sake or mine, to get the game excused for that night, but she was overruled; and, so far as I was concerned, I was not sorry, for I had talked enough that day, and was glad to rest my mind with a different employment.

CHAPTER XIII.

I PASSED the next morning partly in drawing, partly in watching Mr. Wroughton at work on the niche in the hall, while Hugh Wyndham migrated from thence to the library and back again, alternately looking at the painter's performance and at mine, and wondering to me, apart, at the uncommon degree of talent which Wroughton exhibited in his landscape drawings, when his "line" was so decidedly for figures such as he was then busied with.

After luncheon, I went with my mother and our elder guest on a long drive through

some of the most picturesque parts of the neighbouring county. Mr. Wyndham joined his friends Herries and Garth at their trout stream, and his brother took a ride by himself in the direction, as I concluded, of the Glynnes' abode.

We were back some time before he was, and I was wandering alone in the avenue as he rode up, looking, I thought, so very unlike what a lover—and so light-hearted a lover!—*should* look when returning from an interview with his beloved, that when he had dismounted and was silently leading his horse by my side, I could not help asking him "whether he had been unlucky? If he had mistaken the day, and found his friends were gone to the flower-show this afternoon instead of yesterday?"

"I *am* unlucky," he replied, "but not from missing those I went to see. One may meet what one goes to meet, and be none the better off."

I was less moved than girls generally are, by the mere attraction of a love affair, as such (perhaps I hardly expected to be ever the heroine of one), nor was I, as I have observed, disposed to picture Rosa Glynne to myself as anything particularly interesting; but I was very desirous of showing Hugh Wyndham that I was able to sympathize, as a friend, with a man I would not formerly—and could not now—regard as a suitor; therefore, I determined to give him the power, if he would let me, of opening his heart, though I noways purposed to push myself into his confidence. I was silent while forming this resolution, which I did not well know how to carry out; but he anticipated my intention by saying in a listless tone :—

"I'm afraid it would bore you sadly to hear all the stupid ins and outs of a very provoking business, and yet you can't understand it otherwise."

"Being established as your 'friend for the

present,' I should be a very bad one," returned I, "if I were bored by hearing particulars which affect your prospects; so, if you don't mind talking of them, I am ready to listen for as long as you like."

"It's very kind of you," said he, taking my hand with a look of artless gratitude that charmed me, "and," continued he with a slight smile, "you will hear me go on long enough, to punish you for your good nature! but it can't be now, for there's that abominable dressing-bell pealing already, and we are condemned to whist and generalities till bed-time. To be sure, I believe Herries and Garth both dine here, and the Strattons' man of business too, so there's hope of settling the whole pack somehow in the evening. How I wish I was to dine *tête-à-tête* with you!—and I dare say you would excuse my dressing!"

"Oh no, I shouldn't do that! I am too

good a friend to encourage idleness," cried I, as we reached the house, which *I* entered instantly, while he led his horse round to the stable. At dinner, the two sporting men, the lawyer, and Mr. Wyndham did the whole talking business; for my mother was tired, I was idle, Hugh Wyndham dispirited, and Mr. Wroughton so borne down by the somewhat defiant tone of worldly wisdom exhibited by the four elder members of the party as to relapse in a great measure into his original state of grave reserve.

In the drawing-room, there was a momentary notion of two whist tables being set out, seeing that there were eight persons present; but Hugh Wyndham contrived to seat Wroughton quietly down to *écarté* with my mother, while the other men went to work at their rubber with might and main, and he himself came, ostensibly to help me to put the contents of a portfolio of engravings in order, but really to explain to me at length—for-

getting his opinion of the "green-wood's" being the only proper place for confidential talk—the whole of his situation past, present, and future, as regarded Miss Rosa Glynne. There was nothing very uncommon in it, as I even then perceived, it being, briefly, that neither Hugh Wyndham's present fortune nor future expectations were such as to entitle him to hope that Mr. and Mrs. Glynne of Hincksley Park would look on him as a desirable suitor for their third daughter, Rosa, with whom he had been thrown for some weeks together, last Christmas, in the country house of a mutual friend. He had, subsequently, had himself introduced by a relation at a party given by the Glynnes at Brighton, where they were spending the winter, and, having made good his lodgment, he proceeded, whenever he could obtain leave from his regiment for a few days, to express his devotion to the lady of his heart, by every word and deed in his power, saving and

except by that which would have instantly led to an investigation, on the part of her father, as to whether such property existed on his side as could, when joined to the moderate portion bestowed on each of the five Miss Glynnes, be expected to maintain two persons brought up in habits of refined luxury, and the possible offspring of their union.

"I was ten thousand times on the point of it," said he, "for it seemed so like playing a game, when one was in earnest, to keep back the words that must bring a decision! only I dreaded so lest the decision should be unfavourable—in fact I knew it must be, as far as the higher powers were concerned, and I don't know in what degree Rosa is swayed by them. Still, I believe the question would have come out of my mouth, whether I would or no, if she had not herself given me to understand, in a way I could not avoid taking in—though it was expressed in a half-joking

manner—that I had better not hurry myself, because, when she had been another season about in the world, her mamma would expect less great matches for her, and, in fact, let her go cheaper. Then I was given hints that if Laura Glynne—the eldest sister—should some day be Lady Framfield (you will never mention these speculations, I am sure, Miss Lee!), I might, if I didn't in the meantime get forbidden the house, make myself a friend, and a useful friend, of Sir George Framfield, by whose help I might—it would take a month to explain how—be so much bettered in position as to be thought at least not inadmissible. Well, you can comprehend how all this was said without purporting to be meant for me, though, of course, I felt it was; and, knowing I could not, anyhow, marry Rosa for a year or two to come, I was not ill-pleased to put off the horrid investigations, and the terrible risk of being deprived of all means of seeing her

openly. As it was, I *could* see her and speak to her—not as often as I wished—but still, what you would call often enough; and that was a great thing, especially as I felt persuaded she understood me, and neither doubted of my feelings, nor misinterpreted my motives for not declaring them. So I looked on myself as engaged, as I told you the day before yesterday, though I never did go through the form of the thing with Rosa; and I thought I should be welcome to *her*, and endured by the rest, if I managed to pass my six weeks' leave here just now, riding over to Hincksley every now and then, and calling in a not too obvious manner. Well, I told one of the Dashwoods, who, as I know, always writes everything to Rosa, that I was coming down here (I met her in town the very day I had written to offer myself to Owen, and it was from her I heard about the flower-show of yesterday); so I thought it could only be understood that I was going on just as I had been for the last

six months, when, behold! on my reaching Hincksley I found that, though I was received just as usual—neither better nor worse—by the heads of the house, it was not at all the same as concerned the person on whose account I had gone there; for, instead of helping me, as she had been used, to take advantage of every chance that could afford us a word or two to ourselves, she did exactly the reverse, and when I *did* manage to be as good as alone with her—while the others were talking to visitors just before I took my leave—and complained, of course, of the way I had been treated, the answer I got was to the effect that "no one could suppose I cared to have any private conversation with one whom I could see quite sufficiently in public for the mere ends of amusement and light trifling," which was telling me pretty plainly that I was no longer viewed as I had been, but set down as a sheer and mere dangler, who, once seen through, was to be got rid of directly!

I replied that she had never been more mistaken in her life; she shook her head incredulously, and, before I could speak again, Mrs. Glynne called her to do something to one of the flower-vases. By that time my horse, which had been ordered, was come round; I saw no hope of an explanation, and dared not arrive here too late, for fear of exciting curiosity, so I took up my hat, said good-bye to them all, and having just given *her* a look that may have told her how ill-used I thought myself, I even rode home again! Now, what do you think can have been the meaning of this?"

I thought, that either Miss Rosa had found a richer admirer within the last few weeks, or else that she was displeased at having her own hints to let things remain as they were too exactly complied with; but neither of these conjectures was easy to express, with the delicacy and reverence due to the mistress of my new friend's affections; so I looked

down in silence, and he went on presently, as if much more desirous of a vent for his feelings than of replies to his questions:—

"Now, if I were once in the belief that she is herself weary of the concern—thinks it a flat business, and me not worth giving up better chances for—why, no one would be in a greater hurry to make his bow, and have done once for all with such a heartless, calculating thing! But I am not precisely in that belief *yet;* and there was something in her voice and look, while she addressed that pleasant speech to me this afternoon, which has made me ask myself, since, whether perhaps some of them had not put her up to 'bringing me to the point,' as they call it, (just because *they* hope it would put an end to the matter), which would be very different. Still she must know herself that if I haven't spoken, it is to avoid being forbid the house; I thought I was doing what she would like best—in the

only kind of choice that is open to us—by sparing her the doubts and scruples of a secret engagement; but I'll be hanged if I know what would please her ("I am not sure if she knows herself," he muttered); but I can't stand being thought a vain, selfish fellow, who says A when he won't say B, and makes professions he would be sorry to follow up! Heaven knows I wish to do what would make her happiest! Tell me now, if you were in her place—suppose it for a moment—what would *you* like me to do?"

"If I were in Miss Glynne's position, knowing your feelings as thoroughly as you assume she must know them, and fearing, with reason, that a declaration on your part would be the signal for a hindrance to your intercourse, I should—so far as I know myself—wish and hope you to make none, being satisfied with the pleasure of frequent meetings, and caring little for the criticism that might be bestowed on me, while I was conscious of nothing

deserving blame. The dread of being able to meet no more would make me prefer that line of conduct for years and years—ay, even for ever!—that is, if I trusted you as I have been supposing, and as I fully believe you are worthy to be trusted!"

"Years and years are longer than I should bargain for," cried he, "but I wish Rosa could hear what you are kind enough to think of me! So that would be your feeling?"

"Yes, it would; but I am not sure it would be everyone's; and you must remember it would only be mine on the supposition that I was as thoroughly persuaded as I, in my quality of third person, am now of the truth and steadiness of your attachment. If Miss Glynne is doubtful—has been made doubtful—of yours, I can't wonder at her feeling an anxiety which leads her to wish to test it."

"True—true! That's how it has been with her, I can guess; and I suppose I must speak out, though I hate taking the risk; for who knows what may happen, when two people can't meet for years perhaps, though they have parted with ever such sincere vows of faith and truth? Do you think it would be wrong to propose a secret engagement to her?"

For all the secluded, nun-like existence that had been mine, I felt myself so careless on certain points, so lawless, as it were, in comparison with this brother of Owen Wyndham's, who honestly scrupled to do aught that should trouble the conscience of her he loved, that, notwithstanding my genuine admiration for his single-heartedness, I could not help smiling at the oddity of being thus consulted by him, and I had to pause, in a manner which I believe he attributed to very different feelings, before I could answer with due decorum, that "I considered *that* must depend

on circumstances I could not possibly judge of. If Miss Glynne were trusted boundlessly by her mother, and treated with the kindness that claims and invites confidence, her duty would be very different from what it would be, if she were only looked after as a member of the family, who must, of course, be thought of as such, and who was to be watched with some care, to prevent her making a bad match."

"I can't tell," said he, "how all that is; I should think it was something betwixt and between the two extremes you mention; at any rate, Rosa must judge for herself, and I shall, at all events, have done my best to satisfy her of what I feel, though I honestly believe it would be better for us both to leave things as they are. You have been very good in talking to me this way; for how can it interest you? If you knew Rosa, as I wish you did, it would be different—very! And I had a thousand times rather talk these things over

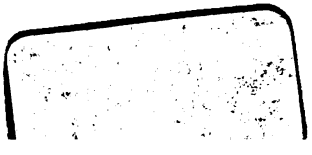
with you than with Fanny Dashwood. I almost wonder that you never saw Rosa at the Dashwoods, while you have been calling on the governess."

I explained that I never went there except to the school-room, during the hours when I knew beforehand that Mademoiselle Le Gallois was there, and at leisure, and that I had scarcely even seen the elder sister of my friend's young pupils.

"It is wonderful to me," observed Hugh, with a musing look, "that you, knowing so few people as you do, should have so much knowledge of other things besides books that you should be able to advise one so well!"

I answered with some commonplace remark about that sort of thing depending more on feeling than on adventitious knowledge, privately considering that my advice was only thought so excellent because it in the main coincided with the wishes and plans of my

friend and ally, who went on lamenting my seclusion, and thanking me for my sympathy, till both whist and écarté ended, and we all retired to our rooms.

END OF VOL. I.

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